# THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD STORIES

JEANNETTE MARKS

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The children too were on horseback.

# THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD STORIES

BY JEANNETTE MARKS
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TO
"The Professor"
AND
"Little Miss Hilly of Northampton Town"

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# THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD STORIES

## Chapter I

### ONCE UPON A TIME

"There is so much to do! There is so much to be seen! They know nothing who stir not out! Wouldn't it be fun to start off merrily following strange roads which might lead to wonderful adventures?"

"Well, we wouldn't be bookworms, I hope," put in Douglas.

"You shan't call Paul a bookworm!" exclaimed Mary.

"I didn't," contradicted Douglas.

"Maybe you didn't," said Belle, "but everybody knows what you meant. I think you're too mean for words stirring us up so. And I just wish some other brothers were half so nice as Paul! So there!"

"Come, come, children," came the quiet command, "don't quarrel on Christmas Eve! Has Aunt Jan said a word about bookworms?

There aren't any down here by this fireside. Maybe there are some up there among the bookshelves. But we have only spirited boys and girls here who, if we go on that journey, would take whatever came in good spirit."

"I want to go on an adventure dreadfully," called out little Dicky, getting up.

"What are you going to do?"

"Get my hat and coat," said Dicky, "for I want to go!"

"Come, sit down by Aunt Jan then and let's plan what we will do."

Dicky sat down unwillingly. He explained that he liked those monsters and heroes and little boys he had lived with and he wished to go see them!

"Please," said Ferris, "I'd like to see something new."

"Let's put on our thinking caps!" said Auntie.

"Does this story begin 'once upon a time'?" inquired Douglas, suspiciously. "'Cause if it does, I don't want to hear it."

"Oh, Doug, you're just the rudest boy ever lived!" exclaimed Belle. "I want to hear it."

"Aunt Jan didn't say he had to stay," came the quiet remark.

Douglas sat sullenly back, his shoulders resting against the fireplace. He made no attempt to go.

"Now, Aunt Jan, do go on!" called the children.

"Well, once upon a time," she began, and there was a twinkle in her eyes as she looked at Douglas and winked at Belle, "once upon a time on Christmas Eve there was a very happy family of eight young children and one old Auntie gathered together. And they were telling stories cosily by the fire and trying not to think too much about Santa Claus and the presents he would bring them."

"I know what I want," said Douglas, forgetting to be sulky, "I want a silver bridle for Bluebell."

"And I want a bow and arrow," said Ferris.

"I'd like a pretty clock," chimed in Belle.

"And I want a pony," cried Dicky.

"And I a puppy, a little collie puppy," said Mary.

"I'd like a book by Aunt Jan," Paul added.

"I don't want any old book," exploded Janet, "I want another cart for our pony."

"I think new skates would be awfully nice to have," said Alice.

"Well, see here, children, I thought we weren't going to think about our presents until we waked up tomorrow morning."

"Yes, and we shook hands and said we wouldn't talk about them even," came from Paul.

"Then let me go on . . . So the children decided they would cross over a great, great big mountain called TIME. And this mountain had a sky line all fledged with trees hundreds and hundreds of years old. And there were great caverns in the sides of Old Mountain Time. And the caverns of rock were older even than the trees."

"Were there any monsters living in the caverns?" asked Dicky.

"Yes, there were some giants. Some of them were twenty-eight feet long. And some were fifty feet long. And I think there was a small handful of giants about seventy-five feet long."

"Who ever heard of a handful of giants!" sniffed Douglas.

"Whoever heard of a giant who wouldn't be a handful!" said Paul quietly.

The children shouted with laughter at Douglas' expense.

"Even your big hand, Doug," laughed Belle, "would be pretty full with just one small sized giant, let alone the big ones."

"Whist!" came from Aunt Jan, "let us go on, children! And over that mountain fledged with hoary trees and pitted with deep caverns had flown every single one of these children!"

"How did they get over?" inquired Paul.

"Oh, I know," said Alice, "they went over in flying machines, didn't they, Auntie?"

"Come to think about it they probably did. Aeroplanes go so fast they can save time. So I should think they probably made time. Anyhow they made time getting over the mountain!"

"You're just teasing us!" said Belle.

"No, I'm not teasing you. But you children ask so many questions, you don't give me a chance to hear myself think."

"Go on, go on!" begged the children.

"Well, I will if you don't keep interrupting me. Now let me see; we couldn't have gone over the mountain called TIME more quickly if we had ridden astride a broom stick. And there we were on the other side of Old Mountain Time with its hoary trees fledging the sky-line and its deep-pitted caverns. All about the caverns were thick woods."

"Were there children in the woods?" asked little Mary.

"Now that I think of it," replied Aunt Jan, "there might have been children there."

"Did you hear any?" asked little Janet, her Aunt's namesake.

"I can't remember! But let's go on. And how much time do you think lay behind us?"

"I don't know!" exclaimed Alice, "a whole mountain full?"

"A day and a half?" asked little Mary.

"A night, perhaps," said Janet.

"No, not a night and not a day and a half, and not even a mountain entirely full, but just six hundred years Yes, six hundred years had we left behind us. One side of Old Mountain Time was today—the side the sun was on and the one we were looking at before

we flew over the mountain. On the other side, and only down a little way at that, it was six hundred years ago. Think, six hundred years ago! Whist! and we were out of theTwentieth Century and back in the Fourteenth Century in dear old England!"

"What happened then?" asked Dicky.

"Let me see! What did we meet first? Oh, yes, a nice gentleman with a ruddy face and close-cropped beard and hair. He wore a silk doublet and a cloak made of satin and fur and there was a feather in his cap."

"Was it a big feather?" Ferris wanted to know.

"I think it was a small feather," said Aunt Jan, squinting her eyes, "yes, it was a small feather."

"He must have been a sissy, wearing feathers!" growled Douglas.

"Yes, he was such a sissy," agreed Aunt Jan, "that he had travelled the world over, fought in I don't know how many battles and won I don't know how many honors and written a book."

"Of course we all know he couldn't be as brave as you, Doug!" laughed Belle.

"Who said I was brave?" snapped Douglas.

"What was his name?" Paul asked.

"His name was Sir John Mandeville. And he had seen more wonderful things and done more wonderful things than any other man in Europe!"

"Did he say anything to us when he saw us?" asked little Mary.

"Yes, he said, 'Come my children, let us go on a wonderful journey'."

"Did we go?" inquired little Dicky.

"Yes, we went."

"What did we see?"

"Well, what did we see? So much I can scarcely remember it all! You children were on ponies."

"Were they real live ponies?" Dicky wanted to know.

"Yes, very much alive,—hard to manage," replied Aunt Jan solemnly.

'Oh, I do hope Santa Claus will give me a pony," sighed Dicky.

"Well, children, you saw the finest roads in the world and travelled over them. You wore beautiful clothes such as you had never seen before. You rode over quaint bridges and

passed gay companies of pilgrims. You heard all about Robin Hood from minstrels who were singing ballads about him and his brave deeds. You stayed at a country inn and had the strangest food to eat and slept in the oddest beds. You heard a beautiful story there, too, about the Children in The Wood."

"There are those children after all, Aunt Jan," said Alice.

"Sure enough, child. They must have been there then. Now let me see. Oh yes, you went to a Goose Fair and saw some other geese besides those you are accustomed to see!"

"You're calling us geese," said Alice.

"Well, aren't you?" Aunt Jan laughed.

"And, let me see, you saw a good deal else. Then you dressed yourselves in your strange new clothes, mounted your ponies again and went on to London Town. You saw London Bridge, and Douglas," Aunt Jan closed her eyes, "I can't just see what he did do, but it was something. You lived in London and had an encounter with some lively pigs which also lived in London. You heard about Master Geoffrey Chaucer, the poet, and saw him pass-

ing in the distance while you were standing by Westminster Abbey watching the Westminster school boys. You met a little page of the royal household and heard all about his life. And then, most wonderful of all, you met Master Geoffrey Chaucer."

"What's a poet?" said Ferris suspiciously.

"Is it out of a school book?" asked chubby Mary, "'cause if it is I don't want it."

"Who wants to meet any old poet?" growled Douglas sleepily.

"I'm sure poets must be afraid of bears. Now that I think of it," added Aunt Jan, "it seems to me I have heard they are. Well, this particular poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, came home to your Inn with you and told you a very exciting story about a Cock and a Fox. The day after Sir John took you children out into the country and taught you how to use bows and arrows and to shoot at a target."

"I'd like shooting arrows at a target," said Ferris only half awake.

"And when you had done shooting, Sir John told you the most wonderful stories all about how the rose was first born, of snail shells so big men could live in them, and of

pigmies and giants and goodness only knows what!"

Just at that moment the clock struck, One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine.

"But you keep saying 'you'," objected Alice. "Weren't you there?"

"No, I wasn't there. Children, it is bed-time now."

"What did you do?" asked Belle, who did not want to go to bed.

"I? I fell into a good—long—restful—much—needed—delicious—delightful—"

"What?" said Douglas, as Auntie's voice trailed off further and further.

"Sleep," came the answer.

## Chapter II

## A WONDERFUL ADVENTURE

Douglas stared, for he was looking at someone on horseback who had suddenly joined them. Nobody knew how. Nobody knew just when. But he who had joined them was a merry, wise, sun-browned looking man. And just behind him stood another man. And running and scampering about them was the dearest little fat collie puppy.

"Please," said Douglas, very politely for Douglas, "who are you?"

"A knight I am," answered the man, "and I travel the world over, now to the west side of the world, now to the east side of the world."

"Oh," sighed Janet, "and can we—that is, are we to go with you, Sir Knight?"

"It is that I am here for, my children, to take you."

All the children clapped their hands and danced for joy. "This is Aunt Jan's adventure," they said.

"Call me not Sir Knight, call me Sir John," came from the ruddy-faced man.

"Please, Sir John, what do you do besides travel?" asked Dicky.

"I retell all the stories I come across. And this is my servant Hugh Scarlock who goeth with me everywhere."

"Where do you live?" asked Belle.

"I live nowhere," answered the mysterious Sir John. "Nobody knows where I was born. Forsooth, nobody will ever know when I die. But I will tell you where men say I was born: in St. Albans. Yet was I not born there after all."

"Please," said little Mary, "is that collie puppy my Christmas present?"

"Thy what?" asked Sir John, puzzled, for in those days they did not give Christmas presents.

But he looked so kindly and jolly that the children were not in the least afraid of this mysterious man.

"Please what is the puppy's name?" said Mary.

"The dog's name, little mistress, is Jack Straw, and Straw we call him," explained Hugh Scarlock.

"Come," said Sir John, "we are wasting

time. We have more wonders to see than were ever in the *Arabian Nights*. And I ought to know, for I have been in Arabia. But we take none of the ways across the sea to go out of England. We stay in England. See this road. It is a Roman Road."

"Aye, this Roman Road we are on is a fine road!" said Hugh Scarlock.

"You say it is a Roman Road?" came from Paul.

"Yea, 'tis now the Fourteenth Century and this was built as many centuries or more ago!"

"And lasted all that time?"

"Yea, 'twill last much more than twelve hundred years longer."

"This road we've turned off onto now isn't so good."

"No," came from Sir John, "it hath been built of late. Yet for all that 'tis a fair road. Many folk have given their money or their services to make and keep this road the fair way it is."

The children were not in the least interested in roads. But they were having a good time and they knew it must lead somewhere.

"I forget where you said we are, Sir John, since we flew over Old Mountain Time?" Belle inquired.

"We are in old England, Merry England where all are glad and none be sad."

"Isn't that fun! Then we don't have to go back to our books for ages?"

"Nay, of books there will be none on this journey."

Already they were passing many people on the road, gaily clad, talkative, merry people who had a pleasant greeting for all and looked at the children as if they were old friends.

"Everybody speaks so kindly. Are they always so kind?"

"Not always. We may be set upon by thieves and robbed or beaten to death," came from Sir John. "And we can do naught else but take the fortunes of the road."

"Oh, we don't want to be robbed! We don't want to be beaten to death!" cried the children.

"Wouldn't Robin Hood and his men help us?" asked Douglas.

"Come, children, be quiet!"

"Look at those people!" Alice exclaimed.

"Aren't they too funny looking!" laughed Belle.

"No funnier looking than we are," said Douglas, "for just look at the clothes we're dressed in!"

And sure enough! The children did not realize until Douglas spoke that their clothes were just like those of some pilgrims who were passing them. When they had been whisked over Old Mountain Time, which was all that divided them from six hundred years ago, they must have left behind them the clothes which children wear nowadays.

For they were clad in bright-colored flowing garments much like those their elders wore. Their hair was curled prettily and they had odd little caps on their heads and soft lined capes over their shoulders. The boys were wearing tight breeches and high boots; the girls loose sleeves.

And when the children looked at themselves, they realized that they, too, were all on horseback. Such lively, graceful ponies with proud arched necks, caparisoned with handsome saddles and bridles studded with jewels and heavy lace nets! The children were wild

with delight when they found that they were all riding, and that they themselves were so gaily and prettily dressed.

"Just think, we're all riding on horseback!" they said to Sir John. "Every one of us with a pony all his own! Wouldn't Aunt Jan be glad!"

"Do these ponies belong to us?" asked Dicky.

"Yes. As long as we are upon this journey together thou mayst have each thy horse, my children."

"Then this is my Trotter Aunt Jan promised me for Christmas," sighed Dicky with content.

The children clapped their hands and shouted for joy. And on went the gay little company, gazing to right and to left at the people who passed them on the road.

Just then a large and important looking party went clattering by. Their horses were prancing, their carriage and carts were bumping and thumping on the road. They were wearing thick cloaks which reached up under their hats and big sleeves which fell down over the knees and kept them warm. These were evidently people of great wealth, for

they had many horses, dogs, and servants and the oddest looking carriage and carts ever seen.

The carriage was very magnificent. It had four immense heavy wheels carved and ornamented. The beams were painted in gilt. Four horses drew the carriage, harnessed one in front of another. There was a postillion, a lad not much more than a boy, mounted on one of them.

Inside were marvellous tapestries,—that is hangings with pictures woven into them. The children cou d look in at the square silk-hung windows of the carriage and also through the back. Of embroidered cushions there were many. The ladies in their tight-fitting clothes inside the carriage were making themselves as comfortable as possible. But they must have been very uncomfortable at times, for the great carriage bumped, bumped, bumped along the ruts of the road.

"Yonder carriage," spoke Sir John, "representeth a princely fortune to the sum of a thousand francs or sixteen hundred oxen."

"Gracious," said Douglas, "that's a whole ranch full of oxen!"

"Ranch?" inquired Hugh Scarlock. "What might the meaning of that word be, young master?"

But it was useless for Douglas to explain, for the nearest Hugh Scarlock could come to understanding was that a ranch was somewhat like a farm-stead.

The carriage was now some distance ahead.

"But see all those carts!" exclaimed Paul.

"Yes," said Alice, "aren't they the queerest, dearest little carts!"

"Just see their wheels go around!" shouted Dicky.

"Of course, you silly," answered Janet, "that's what wheels are for."

The little carts looked something like dump carts. And they had great hob nails on the wheels. They were very heavy and bumped amazingly on the road. A few of the carts were made of slats latticed with willow. They looked like baskets and were lighter and rather pretty.

"That looks like my governess' trap Aunt Jan has promised me for Christmas," said Janet.

But they were drawn by horses or dogs and

had great hobnails on the wheels, and were for the common people to travel in.

"Please, Sir John," said little Dicky, looking at the pilgrims, "how do they get anything to eat?"

Little Dicky was plump and he rode a plump little pony. His cheeks were red and his eyes were blue and I think he was hungry.

"On these journeys, little one, men bring with them in part that which they have wish or need to eat."

Dicky looked hopeful and called back, "Sir John, what do they have to eat?"

Sir John touched his horse with his spur. "There will be meat and bread, cheese and butter, sauce, milk and beer."

"I don't think that sounds like nice food," said Alice, under her breath, for she was a polite girl and did not want to hurt Sir John's feelings.

"But I am so hungry!" wailed Dicky.

"Keep still, children! Know that we shall soon be at an Inn," replied Sir John, "where we may eat our fill!"

"Um, um," said Douglas, patting his stomach, "that sounds good to me!"

It was at this moment that Alice confided to Janet that she thought Sir John spoke a little like Mam'selle.

"But he says he is English," whispered Janet.

"Isn't it all mysterious," said Alice, "and such fun!"

"How did they get these old roads and bridges built anyway?" asked Douglas, who was riding along on a handsome little pony which pranced and jerked its bridle.

"In France," replied Sir John, "there was once a religious order called The Pontiff Brothers (pons=bridge) whose sole business it was to build bridges and lessen the hardships of the poor traveler. That was the twelfth century, forsooth a long while ago. Here in England, too, we count bridge building as holy work."

"Was building London Bridge holy work?" asked Douglas.

"Yes," answered Sir John, "very holy work. And thou wilt see that these bridges, most of them, have chapels built upon them. And there are religious lay brotherhoods who keep the roads in repair."

"See that company going by!" called Paul.

"Aye, these companies of ladies and gentlemen with their hosts of servants have need of good roads and bridges," explained Hugh Scarlock. "They are landed proprietors and, like farmers, have to live on the produce of their lands."

"During times of peace," added Sir John, "these companies of knights and ladies and their servants move about from place to place as they have need for food. Good roads must they have. But in the rainy weather despite all work upon the roads, there is no certainty that even a royal summons can be answered. There are floods innumerable to meet the man who goeth forth in rainy season. Neither thick cloak nor good horse availeth where bridges have been swept away by flood."

"When does the rainy season come?" asked Alice.

"It cometh shortly after we arrive in London," answered Sir John.

"And will the bridges all be swept away by floods?" Belle wanted to know.

"Nay, child, London Bridge at least not."

"London Bridge is falling down, falling

down, London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady," the children began to chant.

Sir John looked at them oddly, "Where didst get that rhyme, little ones?"

"Mother Goose!" they shouted.

"And, prithee, who is Mother Goose?" he asked.

The children stared, puzzled. Not know Mother Goose? It seemed too odd for words.

"Oh, I know," said Paul, who was a quiet, clever boy, "probably Mother Goose is not born yet. Being whisked over that Old Mountain Time has made everything different, hasn't it? I guess Mother Goose isn't born yet!"

Sir John was thinking. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Aye, aye, Bertha *au Grand Pied*, Mother Goose who telleth stories!"

"Then you know Mother Goose?" said Alice politely.

"Yes, yes. She is famous in France, is Bertha *au Grand Pied*, that is Mother Goose."

## Chapter III

## ROBIN HOOD

Down the road came a big company of men and women singing gaily. All were on foot. And some were playing as well as singing. One of them was leading a bear.

"Oh, who are they?" cried Dicky, forgetting as he listened to the jolly songs that he was hungry. "Is it a circus?"

"A circus?" asked Sir John, puzzled. "What then, good children, is a circus? These are minstrels, jugglers, and tumblers."

In their hands the musicians carried instruments, some of them strange-looking objects. One man had a vielle, a sort of fiddle with a bow. A slender fair-haired boy carried a tambourine. A large fat man was blowing industriously on a bag pipe. His cheeks were almost as fat as his bag. And there were still others with harps, flutes and guitars. It was a big and prosperous company. Many of the musicians wore fur cloaks and rich garments.

The passing Minstrels.

For, Sir John explained, the musicians were very popular and seldom left a great hall or castle without receiving presents as well as money.

"Isn't it pretty music?" said Belle, her pony prancing with every rattle of the on-coming tambourines and the continuous yapping of the collie, Jack Straw.

"What are they singing?"

"These men sing of Robin Hood," answered Sir John.

"I want to meet Robin Hood," said Douglas, looking very important.

"Have you told him so?" mischievously inquired Dicky.

"Thou canst not meet him, my boy," said Sir John, "for Robin Hood hath been dead these two hundred years or more."

"Then what are they singing about him still?" asked Douglas.

"That he was a valiant knight, my son, and a good man despite his outlawry. Men sing his brave deeds more and more every day. He who thinketh more of others than of himself shall not soon be forgotten."

"That is for you, Doug," laughed Belle, for

Douglas was a selfish boy and thought ever most of himself and first of himself.

"Please, Sir John," said Janet, with difficulty sitting her frisky little pony, now excited by the song and the approach of the bear, "who was Robin Hood?"

"Draw aside, children, here upon the roadside," answered Sir John, "where we can safely await the coming of the minstrels. I will tell you all about Robin Hood."

"Oh, see, see, see!" cried little Mary as the bear came nearer and nearer.

"Make Straw fast!" called Sir John to Scarlock. "See that the dog adventureth not out upon the highway lest the bear devour him and we lose a good friend."

They reined in their ponies to one side of the road, listening to Sir John and gazing eagerly at the minstrels coming down the road.

"'Tis said," began Sir John, "Robin Hood was a man of gentle birth. But his lands and money gone, he fled to the woods. There he lived as an outlaw. Stories gathered about his name. In his own misfortune he had become a champion of the unfortunate. He was a kind and generous man, as courtly and full

of chivalry as a knight. His friends were the poor and weak. His enemies were the rich and strong."

'For I never yet hurt any man
That honest is and true;
But those that give their minds to live
Upon other men's due.

I never hurt the husbandmen
That used to till the ground;
Nor spill their blood that range the wood
To follow hawk or hound.'

"But you said Robin Hood was an outlaw," exclaimed Douglas, thinking he had got the better of Sir John.

"Yea, but 'twas a rough sort of justice Robin Hood meted out to those who did ill. And there seemed then none who were doing better than Robin Hood."

"Why did he have to do anything at all?" asked Douglas, saucily.

Douglas looked around at the other children to see what effect his remarks had upon them. But just at that instant his pony got scent of the bear. From then on Douglas had his hands full keeping Bluebell from bolting.

There was a twinkle in Sir John's eye as he pretended not to see how much difficulty Douglas was having.

"Whoa! Whoa! Steady there!" shouted the boy, as his pony stood on her hind legs and waltzed.

"Ye shall understand," went on Sir John, quietly, "that despite the fact Robin Hood fought against the evils of the *rich*, he was himself a devout religious man. Dost remember, boy, hearing tales about King Arthur and his knights?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" answered all the children eagerly.

They had heard about King Arthur from stories Aunt Jan had told, and thought they were about to hear more.

"No," said Sir John, understanding their eagerness. "I have naught at this moment to say about King Arthur. I would only say, my little ones, that Robin Hood is the people's ideal of a hero, just as Arthur was that of the upper classes. It is possible that they are equally legendary."

"What does 'legendary' mean?" asked Ferris.

"Any marvellous old story of whose history men are uncertain," replied Sir John. "Robin Hood was a great hunter and loved the life of the greenwood. And he was most generous as well as brave. Listen to these words, my children."

Sir John held up his finger.

The minstrels, who were now almost near enough so that every word could be heard, were singing of Robin Hood:

'But look ye do no housbonde harm
That tilleth with his plow;
No more ye shall no good yeoman,
That walk'th by green wood shaw,
Ne no knight, ne no squyer,
That would be a good felaw.
These *nobles with their staff and train*,
Ye shall them beat and bind;
The high sheriff of Nottingham,
Him hold in your mind.'

"You can almost hear the words they're singing," said Belle.

And they could, for the minstrels were now very nearly abreast of them. Behind the minstrels were a lot of jugglers, capering to the

music of the ballads. The bear was dancing with them.

"What are they dancing for?" asked Janet.

"For fun, you silly," replied Dicky.

"Yea, for that reason," agreed Sir John, "for the ballad was written as a dance song, and this company of minstrels and jugglers knoweth lively music when they hear it."

The company was passing them now. The children were holding desperately to their ponies, which were prancing and pawing the air. Sir John had taken hold of the bridles of little Mary's and Janet's ponies. And Hugh Scarlock was helping Dicky and Ferris. But Paul, Belle, Alice and Douglas were looking out for themselves as best they could. Douglas was having the worst time on Bluebell, who acted anything but flower-like. She kicked and bucked so that Douglas felt as if he were now standing on his head and then on his heels.

On went the strange company, dancing, singing, performing. One man had a snake in his hand which he coiled and uncoiled jauntily.

"Who is that snake man, please, Sir John?" asked Janet.

"An I believe a mountebank, child. Give him the chance, and he would make us think that this same viper descended from the viper that leapt out of the fire upon St. Paul's hand."

"Where are they all going?" asked Dicky.

"To the Goose Fair," came from Sir John, "where they will promise to heal folk of diseases. There, at least, they will help men to forget their cares."

"Please, Sir John," begged Alice, reining her pony up nearer, "can we go to the Goose Fair, too?"

"Forsooth, thou mightest learn much there," answered Sir John slowly. "And I know not why we should not fare thither."

The children could scarcely hear his reply. The songs and music and jesting of the companies passing them were more noisy than the tambourines. Past went a minstrel with wings attached to his shoulder. He was playing a cittern, a flute-like instrument, with a quill. Past went a bagpiper, blowing furiously upon his bagpipes. The buzzing drones made a strange, wild discord. Past went a gaily clad lad, playing on a clarion. This

looked like a trumpet. Its notes were clear and shrill. Past went a woman, a rebec held on her left arm, and bow in her right. She was playing on the three violin-like strings of the rebec. Past went other loosely and brightly clad figures. Some were playing on the sackbut, a sort of trombone. Some were playing on the syrinx, a wind instrument made of reeds tied together. Some were playing on the gittern, which is much like a guitar. A number were banging brass cymbals violently together.

Never had the children seen such odd-looking musical instruments. The sight of these instruments made Douglas realize how many hundreds of years they had crossed when they had been whisked over Old Mountain Time.

"What is that they're singing now, Sir John?" shouted Dicky, above the loud noise.

All listened and heard repeated over and over again this couplet:

"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

"True words, but idle," said Sir John, "and

oft repeated by a fellow called John Ball. But more of that later."

Just at this moment past went a juggler, balancing something on his cheek. It was a long stick with a grinning head mounted on one end. The fellow was a coarse buffoon, from whose vulgar antics the children, ashamed, turned their eyes away. They liked the music and songs much better. And the bear swaying heavily forward down the road made them realize how much they wanted to go to the Goose Fair.

But Sir John wouldn't let them leave the roadside until the traveling merchants, peddlers, and messengers following in the wake of the singers had passed.

The children were especially interested in the messengers. Some of the messengers were running along very rapidly, clad in short smocks. They carried a staff in the hand and wore a wallet strapped to their belts.

"What do those messengers do?" asked Paul.

"The question is," replied Sir John, "rather one of what they do not do, for they deliver all letters and parcels."

"But don't you have any postmen?" asked little Mary.

"Haven't you a parcel post?" said Paul.

"Postman? Parcel post?" murmured Sir John, looking puzzled.

"Yes, postmen to carry the letters for the government and the public," explained Paul earnestly.

"No," replied Sir John, "of such postmen have I never heard."

They had not gone far on their way after the minstrels whose music and noise sounded so gay, before they came to a queer little house. What looked like a monstrous broomstick stuck out in front of it. Under the broomstick stood an old woman and she was a very hideous old woman.

"Oh, is that the inn?" asked Dicky, a little frightened.

Dicky was eight years old and usually a very plucky boy. But the old woman under the broomstick was enough to frighten any one.

"Is that a witch, please, Sir John?" whispered Janet, getting as close to Sir John as she could.

The old woman's nose was crooked and somewhat hooked too. Her skin was loose and slack and was grained like leather. Her back was bent and her teeth were all gone.

"Who is she?" asked Alice, bravely.

Alice was eleven and a very intelligent, wide-awake girl with fair hair and blue eyes.

"No, good children," answered Sir John, "this is not an inn. This is an ale house. A very evil place 'tis. For here come those who go in over the hedge for fear of being seen going in the front way. And here come those who have no coin. They bring their hosen and their shoon. Even their wedding rings bring they to pay for the ale which depraveth them."

"What's hosen?" whispered little Mary.

"Stockings I guess," came from Belle. "And shoon means shoes, I think."

## Chapter IV

## THE GOAT INN

Soon they reached their inn—the Goat Inn. They were received gladly by the host who asked Sir John many questions. This set the children to wondering again who this very important Sir John was.

"Welcome back from the Holy Land," said the host.

"I didn't know Sir John had been to the Holy Land," whispered Alice to Belle.

Belle was a nice big tall girl of fourteen with rosy cheeks and hazel eyes.

"Yes," she said, "isn't he just wonderful? He's been everywhere."

"And weren't we lucky to find him when we were whisked over Old Mountain Time?" asked Alice.

"Oh isn't it all just too much fun for words!" exclaimed Belle.

"You don't suppose we are asleep," said Alice, "and are going to wake up and find out it isn't real at all, that we're just dreaming?"

Belle pinched her arm and said "Ouch! no, this is real enough!"

The children's ponies were taken away and led off towards the Inn stables.

Sir John's servant, Hugh Scarlock, was carrying some sacks into the Inn.

"Say," said Douglas to Hugh Scarlock, "what's in those old sacks?"

"Food, little Master,"answered Hugh Scarlock, going forward.

"But haven't they got any food in this inn?" asked Douglas.

"Yes, little master, but it is a custom to carry at least a portion of one's food with one."

Hugh Scarlock stopped at the Inn door and spoke to an attendant.

"Hast rooms for my master and his party?" demanded Hugh.

"Yea, if the young ladies will sleep together in one room, and the young gentlemen in another."

Then Douglas and Alice, who was just behind Douglas, were amazed to hear Hugh Scarlock say, "My master bade me express the wish that there be no fleas, bugs, or other vermin in the rooms."

"No, sir, please God," answered the attendant. "I make bold to say that ye shall be well and comfortably housed here,—save that there's a great peck of rats and mice."

"Rats and mice," thought Alice, "oh, if there's one thing I can't endure, it is a rat or a mouse!"

"Prithee, what will be the charge for the beds?" asked Hugh, who was making all arrangements for his master.

"A penny a head," came the reply.

"Mercy me!" thought Alice, "think of getting a bed for a penny."

The noise of their voices sounded loud in the quaint courtyard of the Inn, which they had entered. The Inn was built around three sides of the court and was made of wood and plaster.

"That means two cents," said Douglas, "for we are in England now where one penny is equal to two of ours."

"Oh," said Alice, "but think of getting a bed for only two cents!"

"Then that will make our beds come to ten pennies," figured Douglas who was clever at figures, "multiply that by two and we pay

The children entered the inn.

twenty cents for all our beds tonight. I wonder what the food will cost."

"And there will be our candles," said Belle, "for we can't undress in the dark. And there will be the fuel for our fires, for it is cold. And there must be fodder for the horses."

All had entered the odd house with its big hallway and enormous fireplace in which burned a great log fire. The windows were made of small leaded panes. Above their heads were many oaken rafters, black with smoke and age. Under their feet were strewn rushes instead of carpets or rugs.

A door was open and they could see a huge kitchen in which cooks and kitchen boys were hurrying about. Bright pots and kettles they saw, too, upon the walls and in the racks. They could see the cook turning something on the turnspit before the fire in order to roast it. For there were no ovens then.

It was noonday. The children were hungry. Everything smelled so good. Eagerly did the children troop up the winding carved stairway to reach their rooms above. The sooner there, the sooner down and with something to eat.

When they came down stairs again, there by the fire was a big table spread for them. And what do you think was happening? The carver had a hold of the roasted joint of meat with his left hand and was carving with the knife held in the right hand.

Alice and Belle exchanged glances.

"Isn't that a queer way to carve," said Alice, "holding the meat with your fingers? Why doesn't he use a fork?"

"I don't know," whispered Belle. "You ask him."

"No, you," said Alice.

"I had just as soon," replied Belle.

And she asked the servitor who was carving why he did not use a fork. But he did not understand her. When she made a fork with her fingers, he understood her even less.

At last he exclaimed. "For lifting the hay, Mistress?"

"No," said Alice, "for the roast. The fork that goes with the roast and the carving knife."

The man shook his head.

The girls, joined now by the other children who had come down stairs, looked about the

table. It was a wooden trestle, set across wooden horses and covered with a white cloth. Upon the cloth were only knives. Not a fork to be seen! Thick slices of bread there were where plates would naturally be. And there were odd looking mugs called leather jacks. These mugs were made of leather and were used for ale and beer.

"Isn't that the queerest looking table you ever did see?" whispered Janet.

"Hush," said Paul, "this must be the way they set tables six hundred years ago!"

When Sir John came down stairs, they all sat down.

Both carver and cup bearer worked busily. Greatly to their surprise the children found they were to have no plates. Large slices of meat were put on the big pieces of bread before each place. They giggled and whispered and watched Sir John, who was cutting up his meat into thin strips. These thin strips he dipped into a bowl of sauce or gravy which was in the middle of the table. Then he fed the meat strips into his mouth.

Meat, bread, gravy, milk or beer—that was the dinner! Eaten without a fork and with

no spoons. The children were in gales of laughter. They naughtily kicked one another in the rushes under the table. It was only when a servitor passed around a ewer, a sort of pitcher, from which they poured water into a bowl and so washed their hands, that they quieted down.

"Mine host and I," said Sir John, pointing to the jolly fat innkeeper, "have ordered music and ballad for thee, children."

At that moment in came several of the minstrels who had passed them in the morning. While the table was being cleared away, they tuned their instruments and began to sing.

"Come," said Sir John, after they had been singing for awhile, "hast got a ballad for the children?"

"Aye," answered one of them. "We will sing THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD, Master."

And they began to sing.

## Chapter V

## THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD

'Now ponder well, you parents dear,
  These words which I shall write;
A doleful story you shall hear,
  In time brought forth to light.
A gentleman of good account
  In Norfolk dwelt of late,
Who did in honor far surmount
  Most men of his estate.

Sore sick he was, and like to die,
  No help his life could save;
His wife by him as sick did lie,
  And both possessed one grave.
No love between these two was lost,
  Each was to other kind;
In love they lived, in love they died,
  And left two babes behind:

The one a fine and pretty boy,
  Not passing three years old;
The other a girl more young than he,
  And framed in beauty's mould.

The father left his little son,
As plainly doth appear,
When he to perfect age should come,
Three hundred pounds a year.

And to his little daughter Jane
Five hundred pounds in gold,
To be paid down on marriage-day,
Which might not be controlled:
But if the children chance to die,
Ere they to age should come,
There uncle should possess their wealth;
For so the will did run.

"Now, brother," said the dying man,
"Look to my children dear;
Be good unto my boy and girl,
No friends else have they here:
To God and you I recommend
My children dear this day;
But little while be sure we have
Within this world to stay.

"You must be father and mother both,
And uncle all in one;
God knows what will become of them,
When I am dead and gone."

With that bespake their mother dear,
"O brother kind," quoth she,
"You are the man must bring our babes
To wealth or misery:

And if you keep them carefully,
Then God will you reward;
But if you otherwise should deal,
God will your deeds regard."
With lips as cold as any stone,
They kissed their children small:
"God bless you both, my children dear!"
With that the tears did fall.

These speeches then their brother spake
To this sick couple there,—
"The keeping of your little ones,
Sweet sister, do not fear:
God never prosper me nor mine,
Nor aught else that I have,
If I do wrong your children dear,
When you are laid in grave!"

The parents being dead and gone,
The children home he takes,
And brings them straight unto his house,
Where much of them he makes.

He had not kept these pretty babes
A twelvemonth and a day,
But, for their wealth, he did devise
To make them both away.

He bargained with two ruffians strong,
Which were of furious mood,
That they should take these children young,
And slay them in a wood.
He told his wife an artful tale,
He would the children send
To be brought up in fair London,
With one that was his friend.

Away then went those pretty babes,
Rejoicing at that tide,
Rejoicing with a merry mind,
They should on cock-horse ride.
They prate and prattle pleasantly,
As they rode on the way,
To those that should their butchers be,
And work their lives' decay.

So that the pretty speech they had,
Made Murder's heart relent;
And they that undertook the deed,
Full sore did now repent.

Yet one of them more hard of heart,
  Did vow to do his charge,
Because the wretch that hired him
  Had paid him very large.

The other won't agree thereto,
  So here they fall to strife;
With one another they did fight,
  About the children's life:
And he that was of mildest mood,
  Did slay the other there
Within an unfrequented wood;
  The babes did quake for fear;

He took the children by the hand,
  Tears standing in their eyes,
And bade them straightway follow him,
  And look they did not cry:
And two long miles he led them on,
  While they for food complain:
"Stay here," quoth he, "I'll bring you bread,
  When I come back again."

These pretty babes, with hand in hand,
  Went wandering up and down;
But never more could see the man
  Approaching from the town:

Their pretty lips with black-berries,
  Were all besmeared and dyed;
And when they saw the darksome night,
  They sat them down and cried.

Thus wandered these poor innocents,
  Till death did end their grief;
In one another's arms they died,
  As wanting due relief:
No burial this pretty pair
  Of any man receives,
Till Robin-red-breast piously
  Did cover them with leaves.

And now the heavy wrath of God
  Upon their uncle fell;
Yea, fearful fiends did haunt his house,
  His conscience felt an hell:
His barns were fired, his goods consumed,
  His lands were barren made,
His cattle died within the field,
  And nothing with him staid.

And in a voyage to Portugal
  Two of his sons did die;
And to conclude, himself was brought
  To want and misery:

He pawned and mortgaged all his land
  Ere seven years came about;
And now at length this wicked act
  Did by this means come out:

The fellow that did take in hand
  These children for to kill,
Was for a robbery judged to die;
  Such was God's blessed will;
Who did confess the very truth,
  As here hath been displayed:
Their uncle having died in gaol,
  Where he for debt was laid.

You that executors be made,
  And overseers eke
Of children that be fatherless
  And infants mild and meek;
Take you example by this thing,
  And yield to each his right,
Lest God with such like misery
  Your wicked minds requite.

## Chapter VI

## THE GOOSE FAIR

Little Dicky and Mary and Janet were in tears before the minstrels had finished singing about the poor little children whom there were none to care for except Robin Redbreast. The older boys and girls tried in vain to comfort them.

Sir John repeated over and over "But, my children, my good children, I know not that these children really did die! It is only a ballad yonder minstrels have sung to us. And these ballads made by the common people are sometimes merry and sometimes sad, but seldom true."

"Boo! hoo! hoo!" choked little Janet. "They died cause their cruel uncle—"

"Wow! I want to go home!" wailed Dicky.

"There, there," soothed Sir John. "'Twas a sorry day for me when I called a ballad in doors. Ballads are songs made to be sung out of doors."

"Why?" asked Ferris.

"Here must I put on my thinking cap," said Sir John. "Well, mayhaps 'tis because the houses of the common folk are not often comfortable. They like it better singing together out of doors in the bright warm sunshine. And then the common folk cannot read."

"Can't read?" shouted Douglas, who felt very well satisfied with what he himself could do. "I can read."

"No doubt," smiled Sir John. "But thou wast whisked across a mountain of six hundred years to us and these folk cannot read, either alone or to one another. And they cannot write."

"I guess," said Paul, thoughtfully, "these people in the past sang more and read and wrote less."

"And ye should understand," said Sir John, looking approvingly at the tall, earnest boy, "that these folk must have ballads easily learned and remembered. Somebody hears a little of a tale and tries to sing it to another. And that other adds to what has already been sung. And so the song passeth from lip to lip until it groweth big."

"Just like a snow-ball rolled over and over?" asked Dicky, his tears no longer flowing.

"Yes, like that," agreed Sir John. "The ballad passeth from man to man, and house to house, and village to village. And in the end there is brought forth such a ballad as few houses hear today. Nobody knows who made these ballads. And nobody knows who wrote them down."

"It isn't like one man writing his own poem, is it?" asked little Mary.

"Nay, 'tis the opposite. It is many men writing a poem and each unknown unto the other."

"It is rather hard to remember," said Paul, "that we have gone back some six hundred years, isn't it? On this side of Old Mountain Time, Sir John, doesn't a poet ever write a poem all by himself?"

"Aye, my child. There's Geoffrey Chaucer, an excellent gentleman and a popular poet. He hath a story about a cock and a fox which I will ask him to tell thee. And he hath written many another tale. But thou shalt see him and hear him thyself when thou dost reach London."

They visited the Goose Fair that afternoon. They heard more music. They saw tumblers perform. They saw some strange wild beasts, monkeys, and bears and snakes do their tricks. Never had they seen so many people, big and little, old and young, together as they saw at the Goose Fair.

"I didn't think people had fairs so long ago as this," said Douglas. "The County Fair meets in our town, and, jiminy crickets, you ought to see all the races and shows and the balloon and everything!"

Sir John looked very puzzled, just as if Douglas were speaking a foreign language.

"Aye, aye," he said courteously, "but fairs are most ancient in their history. I cannot tell thee how ancient. But I have met them in whatsoever countries I have been. Thou must go very far back in the history of Merry England to find the first fair—hundreds and hundreds of years, lad."

"How did they ever happen to think of a fair first?"

"That know I not—necessity teaches men. Forsooth in the first place fairs were held as religious celebrations and within the church

on a saint's day. Since William of Normandy, England hath been flooded with fairs, at St. Giles's Hill, Bartholomew Fair at Smithfield. A century ago did the Abbot of Westminster hold a fair as privilege and honor because of his work as a translator."

"Oh, see these odd-looking men!" said Douglas, pointing to a group of merchants offering their wares for sale.

"Aye," observed Sir John, "yonder men are foreigners. Here are many men from over seas with their merchandise to sell, French, Germans, Syrians and others. They come from all parts of the great world and do mingle at these fairs and teach one another their several customs, both good and bad."

But before they knew it, it was bed time and they were in their rooms going to bed. The girls were in one big strange room. Little Mary was allowed to have Jack Straw, the puppy, as a foot warmer and was very happy.

The boys slept together in two great beds in another room separated from the girls' room by a carved oak partition.

"Alice," said Belle, "you remember that conversation about fleas? And the man said

there weren't any fleas here,—but he did not exactly say there wasn't anything. What he said was there were a peck of rats and mice."

"Yes," replied Belle, "I was thinking of that, too. I can't bear mice. And if a rat came out anywhere, I don't know what I should do!"

They heard Hugh Scarlock's voice speaking in the next room.

"Sir John bade me tell thee, young gentlemen, to undress and wash thy legs and then dry them with a cloth. Rub them well for love of the fleas that they may not leap on thy legs."

"Fleas!" said little Dicky, looking miserable again. "My Aunt Jan would not like it at all if she even heard anybody speak about fleas."

"I don't think it's nice," added Ferris.

"Ah, young master," said Hugh Scarlock, "I know not where thou livest. But here have we fleas everywhere. There is a peck of them lying in the dust under the rushes at this very moment."

"Hi," cried Douglas, "the fleas have begun to bite me so!"

"Yes, young master, but 'tis not to be helped in traveling. Everywhere in England the fleas breed in the thatch upon the roofs, and in the rushes upon the floors."

"Goodness gracious me!" sighed Alice on the other side of the oak partition, a whimsical look on her pretty little face, "I don't know but I am sorry we were whisked over Old Mountain Time! I wonder what Aunt Jan would think if she knew that there were fleas, rats and mice all in one house? And what she would think if she knew that I was in that house?"

"Well, don't think," said Belle, philosophically. "Here we are. And if once upon a time people had to put up with such things, we can manage somehow. Aunt Jan always says 'When in Rome do as the Romans do!' If we must be bitten by fleas, we must. That is all."

But she stepped gingerly about on the rushes upon the floor like a cat on ice.

"What is thatch anyway?" they heard Ferris asking of Hugh Scarlock.

"It is a covering of reeds and straw folks put on their roofs to make them tight," answered the man.

"Is there thatch on this roof?" asked Dicky.

"Yea, little master, there is,—a good tight thatch roof," replied Hugh.

"Well, I don't call it good if it has a lot of old fleas in it," exploded Douglas.

"And I don't either," whispered Alice to herself on the other side of the thin partition of oak paneling which was all that separated the girls' room from the boys.

## Chapter VII

## GOING TO LONDON TOWN

They rubbed their eyes hard when they first woke up in the early morning sunshine in rooms the like of which they had never seen before. These immense canopied beds as large as tents and with curtains about them; the floor covered with rushes instead of carpets; the oaken rafters of the exposed peaked or gabled roof over their heads; the little windows through which they looked out upon many straw-bonneted or thatched roofs! The children rubbed their eyes diligently and stared.

Where in the world were they anyhow? Certainly it was not home!

"Paul," said Ferris, thrusting his head out of bed and looking at an odd pile of clothes, "are those my things?"

"Yes, I guess so," answered Paul, sleepily. "Where are we anyway?"

"That's what I want to know," said Ferris,

a little frightened. "And I do wish I had Aunt Jan here."

"Don't be a baby!" said Douglas, who had sprung out of bed and, monarch of all he surveyed, was looking out of the window. "Golly, isn't this a lark! Talk to me about Aladdin's lamp! We have one on that old duffer. Here we are in England six hundred years ago, and having the time of our lives! It's more fun than a whole box of monkeys."

"But I want my Auntie!" loyally wailed Ferris.

Douglas reached for his clothes. "Cricky, what's this?" he cried.

There on top of his clothes lay a bridle all studded with silver and made of beautiful soft white leather. It sparkled and shone like snow. Douglas's thought rushed to Aunt Jan and Christmas morning. He rubbed his eyes. Had Aunt Jan really been here? And where was he anyway? Soberly he picked up the bridle expecting to see it vanish before his eyes. But it seemed real: the silver sparkled and the metal buckles jingled merrily.

"Well, I guess I am awake," he said.

"Isn't it a dandy!" exclaimed Ferris.

"Do you think it is for Dicky's Trotter?"

"Not on your life!" came from Douglas. "It is for Bluebell and it is a good fit, too."

He held up the bright colored tights and doublets he had taken off the night before and stepped into them.

"These are gay enough for Aunt Sally's parrot," he remarked, swaggering about. "But I guess I had better shake out these things, and not be in too much of a hurry! There are fleas in this place, as I found out last night. And I don't want any old fleas on that bridle!"

They had grown almost accustomed to the loose, bright outer garments and tight frocks the girls wore, with flowing sleeves and fur trimming, and to the tights and cloaks of the boys and Sir John, and to the smocks—short garments which came not quite to the knees—of the servants who waited upon them.

"Oh," wailed Dicky, waking up and looking at Douglas, who was dressing, "I want to go home!"

"No, you don't, cry-baby," said Douglas, hauling on his tights. "What you want to do is to go with me to see how Bluebell is. Look at this!"

Douglas held up the silver bridle.

"Oh," sighed Dicky, consoled, "and where is my pony?"

"Out there," said Douglas, nodding towards the open window through which the sun shone. "Come on and let's try the bridle on!"

"And can I ride my Trotter again today?" asked Dicky.

"Of course," replied Douglas. "Now, get up! Here comes Hugh Scarlock."

Great was the excitement of the children when, after their first night in an English inn, they started off for London. Such a stamping of ponies in the courtyard! Such a shouting of stable boys! Such a bewildered and hurried Hugh Scarlock. Douglas's pony, Bluebell, was worse tempered than ever and squealed and reared when Douglas tried to slip the bit of the silver bridle into her mouth. But he got it in and mounted her. Douglas was a good horseman, and sat Bluebell well. And how handsome she did look with the new bridle!

They were not much more than out of the courtyard and on their way to London when a young squire and his attendant passed the

children. How the boys stared! And how wonderful the girls thought the squire! He was very gay and elegant. Probably he was about twenty years of age. His hair was curled. His body was lithe and strong. He wore a coat embroidered as if it had been a meadow full of flowers. And he was singing as gaily as if it were the month of May.

The children missed the minstrels, who had made music for them the day before. Yet they had no chance to feel lonely upon the road, for the nearer they came to London, the more the road was filled with people; big and little; rich and poor; sad and gay; knight, lady, commoner, yeoman, priest, messengers, merchants, peddlers, pardoners, preachers, and pilgrims,—all mankind was passing by, some out of London, some into London. They were on foot. They were on horseback. They were in carts. They were in great carriages. They were in horse litters, —odd, little coop-like conveyances swung between two horses.

On they went towards or away from London. In Great Britain all roads led to or away from London Town. The children

thought they had never been among people who seemed so lighthearted and gay.

"Sir John," asked Paul, "what makes all these people so very, very happy?"

"Thou dost well to ask this question, my son. This is the England we call 'Merry England'."

"Is it really and truly merry?" said Paul.

"Aye, merry because every man taketh his life in his own hands and setteth little value upon that life."

"You mean he doesn't care much about living?" asked Alice.

"Nay, not that, my child. He loveth living. Yet as an amusement he will risk his life, and he expecteth to kill and to be killed and is not saddened thereby."

Douglas looked sullenly at Sir John. He had a shrewd suspicion that Sir John did not think highly of him all the time. And so poor an opinion did Douglas have of himself that almost the one necessity of his nature was to feel that everyone thought well of him.

"Why isn't he saddened by it?" growled Douglas.

"There are so many ways he might die, he

dare not think of death at all," came from Sir John. "Plagues, battles, games, and massacres, any one of these might kill him at any moment."

"When are we going to get to London Bridge, please, Sir John?" piped up little Dicky.

He was convinced he was to meet Mother Goose there, but he had been laughed at so unmercifully by the older children he did not dare talk about Mother Goose any more.

"Yonder is London Bridge," replied Sir John.

## Chapter VIII

## LONDON BRIDGE

The children looked out upon a scene such as they had never gazed upon before: the Thames River, many strange looking boats and ships upon it, a multitude of crenelated towers and several spires. Mediaeval houses were crowded close together, here a great castle or a keep, and there a little row of cottages. Spanning it all, reaching from shore to shore of the River Thames, was London Bridge. It was itself a populous town highway with houses upon the bridge like a continual street, and even a chapel in their midst.

The children gazed in open-eyed astonishment.

"It doesn't look to me as if it were falling down," said little Janet, in a disappointed voice.

"Falling down, child?" repeated Sir John.

"Yes," said Ferris, "you know that rhyme,

"London Bridge is falling down, falling down, London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady."

"Aye," answered Sir John, "that have I heard ye chant before."

"That's Mother Goose," exclaimed Mary in a proud voice. "Aunt Jan reads us Mother Goose often and often."

Sir John smiled. "Forsooth, I have not the honor to have met this Mother Goose in person. The world over have I traveled," continued Sir John, "and the world over is London Bridge a marvel and wonder."

"Douglas," said Belle, turning around to look for her brother and finding neither Douglas nor his pony.

"He's not here," said Alice.

"I wonder where that boy is?" Belle added.

"London Bridge was begun in the twelfth century," continued Sir John, "and 'twas finished in thirty-three years or in 1209."

"Sir John," said Belle, "Douglas has disappeared."

"Disappeared? Thou sayest he is not here?"

"I can't see him anywhere, and I am afraid something has happened to him," explained Belle.

The children looked out upon a scene such as they had never gazed upon before.

A slow smile widened over Sir John's face. "Have no fear, my child. The boy hath gone to make a greater nine days' wonder than London Bridge hath made."

Sir John may have lived hundreds of years ago, but apparently, he understood Douglas's love for adventure and attention. On the other side of Old Mountain Time, boys, young and old, must have been much like Douglas and Ferris, Paul and Dicky.

"But," said Belle, who was a good sister, if somewhat tried at times, "supposing anything should happen to him."

"Think not thereon," answered Sir John. "He hath gone ahead and we shall overtake him."

And so the little party continued peacefully across the Bridge. Sir John rode in front, the children after him, and the servant before. Hugh Scarlock had gone ahead to pay the bridge toll.

"Why do they charge us for crossing London Bridge? Doesn't it belong to London?" asked Paul.

"Aye, my son, it belongeth to London, and in truth, to all England. But it must be

maintained in a state of repair and those who use the bridge, whether they be passengers crossing it or dwellers upon it, must pay in taxes enow to maintain the repairs."

"Do they tax our ponies?" asked Ferris.

"Aye, and not alone us and our horses do they put a tax on. Even the shipmen passing through the drawbridge with their ships, the carriages, coals, timber, wines, sheep, butter, cheese, fish, silk, and many another article do they charge toll for."

"Oh, isn't this the darlingest bridge that ever was?" exclaimed Alice, now that they were well out upon it and could see everything.

They were passing between quaint rows of houses whose second stories projected out over the Thames and over the street, too.

"Please, Sir John," said little Mary, "have these pretty houses any cellars?"

"Yea, the cellars of these houses are down in the piers which uphold London Bridge," answered Sir John.

The noise and thronging and colour of the London Bridge crowd excited the children.

Belle, however, would have enjoyed it

better if she might have caught sight of her brother, Douglas.

There was no place in all England where life was so exciting as upon London Bridge. Of the twenty arches of the Bridge, the thirteenth from the city side was movable and formed a drawbridge through which ships passed up or down the Thames.

The children were looking at this arch when suddenly little Janet cried out.

"Oh, what's that?"

She was gazing upwards, her big eyes wide open with distress at the sight of what seemed to be a dead man's head upon a pole.

"It's a man's head," said Ferris. "Don't look at it, Janet."

"Aye, children, turn thine eyes elsewhere, for 'tis a ghastly sight! 'Tis here the executioner places the heads of criminals whom he hath executed that in the eyes of all they may be still further punished by such notoriety, they and their families! 'Tis a barbarous custom."

"But what did they punish this man for?" asked Alice.

"That can I not tell thee, child. But it was probably for stealing," explained Sir John.

"Cut a man's head off for stealing!" said Alice, her mouth wide open with horror.

"Forsooth and for less than that will they behead a man!" replied Sir John.

The children could scarcely believe this. But Paul was thinking. His father was a reformer, and he remembered having heard his father say that prison reform and reforms in punishment had not well begun until the Thirteenth Century.

"Yea, forsooth," sighed Sir John, "but such matters are better here in good old England than in many another country in which I have traveled where men practice cannibalism or turn their religion into crime."

"I know what cannibals are," said Paul soberly. "They are men who kill and eat one another."

"Yea," agreed Sir John, "and that have I seen done in other countries. Here in England are such evils impossible."

Yet he shook his head and looked sadly at the pole on which was the head of some petty thief.

"We don't punish like that any more," explained Paul. "We try to make men good and not to kill them just out of revenge."

"Forsooth," said Sir John, looking more cheerfully at the earnest boy, "'tis good news. And in what ideal republic might such justice and goodwill be?"

Paul looked puzzled and shook his head. "It is on the other side of Old Mountain Time."

The children tried to take their eyes away from the pole but they could not. The man's face was so ghastly, weather-stained, the hair matted upon the forehead, the eyes rolled open. They were to see this place once more, and in such fashion as they might never forget it again

"Come, look at yonder chapel," said Sir John, trying to draw their attention away. "'Tis the chapel of St. Thomas à Becket."

The chapel, almost a church, before them, kept their thoughts and their eyes busy.

"And behold," said Sir John, "how the good folk of London Bridge draw their water!"

The children caught a glimpse of some buckets being lowered out the window by ropes. Up came the bucket, striking against the pier of the bridge and splashing over a little. The good wife handled the bucket

energetically from the window, hauled it in and then closed the window.

It was just as the woman drew in her head that the children heard a cry. People rushed to the parapet of the Bridge and looked over.

"Tis a lad who hath struck the Bridge and upset."

The dame who had closed her window had heard the cry also. Open came the window and down went the bucket she had just hauled in. She leaned out as far as she could, her snapping black eyes gazing down, her cheeks rosy, her hair black, and the loose sleeves of the garment she wore flapping about her arms, as she lowered the bucket. She seemed to understand exactly what she was doing and to have done it before. First came whirling through the swift water between the piers an odd-looking skiff, bottom-side up.

Next bobbed up a human head.

"Catch a-hold of this bucket," shouted the woman paying out the rope and repeating her command in a loud, clear voice several times.

The boy caught at the bucket and missed it; caught at it again and missed it, while

the woman still paid out her rope. Now she was almost at the end and just as she paid out the last foot, the lad caught hold of the bucket and hung on desperately.

"Hang hard," commanded the woman, "until a skiff cometh through to get thee."

The boy hung hard, whipped out like a fly on the end of a trout line by the swirling quick-water of the river.

Such a commotion was there on that Bridge! Such shouting! Such running to and fro!

Only one figure was still. That was Belle. She was as white as a sheet of paper, and hung without moving over the parapet, for she thought she had recognized her brother, Douglas.

It was like some terrible nightmare to Belle. While she watched there, she saw a skiff manned by two seamen shoot through the piers, saw one of them lean over and haul in the boy, as they shot by. Then she awoke as if from some awful dream.

"Sir John," she whispered, touching his sleeve.

"Lackaday, child, what has happened to

thee?" replied Sir John, startled by the white, terrified face.

"That was Douglas, Sir John. I know it was Douglas," came the answer.

"Douglas!" exclaimed Sir John.

And immediately he began to give orders. Hugh Scarlock dashed forward at a gallop to the London side of the Bridge where the seamen seemed to be taking the boy. The party followed at a gallop almost as rapid. Dogs and cats scuttled out from under foot as they dashed past. Little children fled. Grown people shouted, "Make way! Make way!"

The one thought in the minds of all, as they sped on, was whether it was really Douglas whom they had seen taken half-drowned from the water.

## Chapter IX

## PIGS ABROAD

Excited and pleased they stared about them. This was London of the Fourteenth Century. The stained glass windows of the churches were so gay. The outsides of the houses were so bright and attractive. And the merry people of this Merry England wore gay clothes, velvets, furs, embroideries, silks, and what not.

Never had the children seen such rich and beautiful ornaments as many men and women wore. Never had they seen such long hoods, the part at the back of the head being drawn out into a "liripipe" long enough to be knotted around the brow as a turban. Such odd ankle-shoes, too, as the men were wearing with long points.

"Oh," shouted little Janet, "such funny, funny shoes!"

"Aye, child," answered Sir John, "little chariots for devils to ride in!"

This set the children to laughing so that they were less troubled about Douglas.

"Oh, see those children!" called Alice. "They are dressed just like the older people!"

"Aye," said Sir John, "and so are we all!"

Of that the children had not thought. But they looked at themselves and saw there was little difference between their costume and that of the older folk.

It was evident that men thought as much of the beauty of their person and clothes as women did. And then there was a distinction in dress made which the children had never seen before. It was possible to tell what class men and women belonged to, and what their work was by the kind of clothes they wore. So much did people care about their clothes in this Merry England that it had been necessary to pass laws forbidding a certain class to wear clothes that were too elegant or sumptuous. These laws were called the Sumptuary Laws.

Douglas they found dripping and subdued. He was just getting up behind Hugh Scarlock, who galloped back across the Bridge to find Bluebell. He had not a word to say for himself, but hung his head and looked sheepish and ashamed. He was thinking of

the silver bridle and hoping that it had not been stolen. Nobody needed to tell him how foolish he had been, for he knew it without being told.

The children rode on with Sir John up the street and in the direction of their Inn.

"Yonder is where Geoffrey Chaucer was born," said Sir John.

He pointed to a house several stories high and with a gabled roof. It was near the river and by London Bridge.

"Is Geoffrey Chaucer living?" asked Paul.

"Yea, forsooth, he is, a great poet and not yet old who was raised at court and is beloved by all," replied Sir John. "I know not whether he is in France now, or here in London."

"When was he born?" asked Alice, who always asked this question.

"Men say in 1340," replied Sir John.

"I was born in 1904," exclaimed Alice earnestly. "What year is it now please?"

"'Tis the year of grace 1371," replied Sir John.

"I suppose it's that mountain we were whisked over has done all this to us," sighed

Belle. "I just can't get used to living so many hundreds of years ago."

"I can," said Alice, "and I think it is heaps of fun, for it is all so different and so like the stories Aunt Jan tells."

And so it was,—different from any town or life the children had ever seen. This quaint old London was encircled by walls which can still be seen in the picture of Old London Bridge, a miniature painted from life.

"Have a care!" suddenly commanded Sir John.

Instinctively the children ducked and none too soon did they lower their heads, for they had been almost struck by a shop sign-board that hung across the narrow street. One reason why they had not seen the sign-board was because the street under foot was unlike any street that they had ever seen. They had been too busy looking down at the shop and house doorways to think anything about what might happen to their heads.

Grunt, grunt, grunt! Squeal, squeal, squeal! Scamper, scamper, scamper! There were pigs everywhere under foot, sitting on

doorsteps, scratching their backs up against the sides and corners of houses.

Little Mary and Janet became frightened.

"Please, Sir John," said Janet, "do these pigs bite?"

"No," answered Sir John, "have no fear! They will do thee no harm, child. Yet are they a nuisance under foot.'

"I should think so!" agreed Belle, looking about the crowded dirty street disapprovingly.

"This street is so pretty, Sir John, why can't they keep it clean?" she asked.

"Of cleanliness," he answered, "there seemeth to be no thought at all. There is a pig edict which runs, 'And whoso will keep a pig, let him keep it in his own house'."

The ch ldren laughed.

"Just imagine keeping a pig in the house!" exclaimed Alice. "I wonder what Aunt Jan would think of pigs as pets?"

"I heard of a pig that was very, very clever," said little Ferris.

"But," said Belle, "that doesn't prove that pigs are clean."

"Perhaps they would be," objected Alice, "if the houses were kept clean."

"Anyhow it isn't likely, Alice," said Belle, "that a pig would ever make a good housekeeper."

The children were still giggling about Belle's housekeeping pig when two of the pigs made a dash at little Jack Straw and drove the puppy up against the side of the street where the dog cried pitifully.

"Oh, oh, my doggie!" called little Mary in alarm. "The pigs are eating my doggie!"

"Have no fear, little mistress," said Hugh Scarlock, as he drove the pigs away and took Jack Straw up in his arms.

Multitudes of dogs and cats were scampering across the streets and up and down them. The houses inside were just as full of them as the streets outside.

"Let me see," said Alice, "in just what year of grace is it that all these cats and dogs do flourish so?"

Sir John was enjoying the children's nonsense as they called to and fro to one another above the noise of their ponies' hoofs and the clatter of the street.

"I think," said Sir John, "thou wouldst find this is still the year 1371."

"Well, Sir John," answered Belle, "please tell me how in this year or any other year the people can sleep with all these dogs and cats about?"

"Gentlefolk, my child, have the cats and dogs driven out of the room before they go to sleep. But there are gentlefolk, too, who, loving a favorite dog, have a cloth spread down for him and allow him to remain."

"I like dogs," said little Dicky.

"And so do I," chimed in Ferris.

"My Aunt Jan says a dog is his master's best friend," announced Janet. "Is that so?"

"Aye," replied Sir John. "'Tis true. I suppose thou art of English stock and our English have always loved dogs and are kind to them. In the east, in Constantinople where I have been," continued Sir John, "is all that different. There dogs are neither cared for nor fed, but are the scavengers of the street. Hungry, in packs like wolves, do they run the streets, seizing what they can get. Many men, children, too, I wot," said Sir John, "like to hear of strange things of diverse countries. In the East men sin who shave their beards or who eat any meat that

chews not its cud. But here in Merry England are our customs different."

"I do hope Doug is all right," said Belle.

"Suppose he had his silver bridle stolen," said Dicky, "then Bluebell would have to wear a bridle like my Trotter's!"

## Chapter X

## WESTMINSTER SCHOOL BOYS

As the children were nearing the Inn in which they were to stay in London, they were startled by the ringing of great bells.

"What is it? What is it?" they cried, not knowing what to think as the strange ringing continued.

"Those are the bells of Westminster Abbey yonder," replied Sir John.

The children looked. They saw what seemed to them the most wonderful church they had ever seen. It was cruciform structure,—that is, made in the form of the cross.

"Oh," gasped little Ferris, "was it a man built that?"

"Men say that Edward the Confessor built the Abbey," answered Sir John, "and 'tis in a certain sense true. But the hands which laid stone upon stone were the laborers whom he hired."

The cathedral looked so fresh and beautiful. There were stone masons busy carving, the

dust sparkling as it fell in the early afternoon sunshine.

"Are they just building it?" asked Alice.

"No," replied Sir John, "Edward the Confessor began its erection in 1050. The building was consecrated on Childermass Day, 28th December, 1065. On the next Twelfth Mass Eve did Edward die and the day after was he buried in the Abbey."

"Will they go on building it forever?" asked Janet wistfully looking up at the cathedral.

"The dust of carved stone hath lain every year fresh upon midsummer grass these three centuries," replied Sir John.

They saw the great Abbey stretching away from East to West, its towers and spires, its carved façade.

All about them were buildings different from anything they had ever seen and folk clad in beautiful and unknown garments.

With clashing metal, clad in steel and leather, a sword at his side and bill-hook over his shoulder past went a man on horseback. Past on foot went another man dressed in a black cloth gown which reached to his ankles. This garment had wide sleeves gathered in at

Yonder goeth Sir Geoffrey Chaucer.

the wrists and was prettily embroidered on cuffs and collar. A hood he wore too and broad red leather girdle about the waist. At one side was a hard leather pouch containing pen and ink case and on the other side a sheath knife. The forehead was broad, the eyes large and thoughtful, moustache and beard close clipped and gray,—the whole face beautifully modelled, with firm delicate chin and well-formed shapely nose. A quiet, kindly, dignified face it was.

"Forsooth, yonder goeth my friend, Master Geoffrey Chaucer!" exclaimed Sir John, excitedly. "Would that Hugh Scarlock were here to run fetch him to us."

"I know," said Belle, "he tells the story of the Cock and the Fox."

"Aye, 'tis he. For some time hath he been working on some tales in rhyme. The Cock and the Fox is not yet completely written," came from Sir John, who looked eagerly after the disappearing figure of Master Geoffrey Chaucer.

Then past went a company of young men gaily clad in red or bright green or blue cloth jerkins. In their hands they carried

bows and upon their backs long quivers full of arrows. Some of them had very black hair and others hair burnt to the color of tow.

"Please, Sir John," begged Ferris and Dicky, "may we have some bows and arrows?"

"Aye, gladly," said Sir John, "if ye are good lads ye may have bows and arrows and fare forth to the green woods and play archery."

"My Aunt Jan promised me bow and arrows for Christmas," said Ferris. "And I would rather learn how to shoot arrows than any other kind of shooting."

The children were wild with delight to think that they were to have bows and arrows of their own and were going out into the woods to practice with them.

At that moment forth trooped from Westminster Abbey a large company of college lads. They were coming from the Jerusalem Chamber, the windows of which the children could see from Little Deans Yard. They were tall slender lads with spirited, intelligent faces. And they were clad in odd short clerical-looking garments.

"Yonder come the students of Saint Peter's

College," explained Sir John, "one of the most ancient schools in all England."

"Schools," exclaimed Paul, "I thought there weren't any schools so long ago,—that is in the time we're in now, Sir John?"

"Nay, schools have there been in England for twelve centuries or more."

"But, Sir John," said Paul, eagerly, "do you mean those boys go to school in that beautiful part of the Abbey?"

"Aye, that do I mean. Here from very early days and upon this site hath a school been maintained by the monks. The daily school services they hold in the Abbey. Some of these buildings about Little Deans Yard are the houses of the headmasters who are in charge of the boys. In yonder dormitory do the lads present annually a Latin play which hath a prologue and is followed by a humorous epilogue."

"In Latin?" said Paul, who had already mastered his Latin Grammar and was studying Caesar.

"Aye, in Latin."

"But can they speak Latin?" asked Ferris.

"Yea, as well as English."

Ferris looked as frightened as if he thought he might be going to have to learn to speak Latin.

"Another custom of the lads is the acclamation of the sovereign upon his consecration in the Abbey."

"What's acclamation mean?" asked Alice.

"They hail, they greet the sovereign at his crowning," replied Sir John. "And this privilege guard they jealously. Still another custom have they, called the "Pancake Greaze." And of that struggle for a pancake ye may know more some day. But now must we go on to our Inn opposite Thorney Island. Of English schools shall ye hear more later and meet some of the lads, too, if ye will."

And on they went to their Inn called Bramble Inn. As they entered they heard Hugh Scarlock, by whom Douglas stood shaking, talking with the innkeeper, a big man six feet high.

"Well, lad," said the innkeeper to Douglas, "thou lookest mazed. Hast thou a tongue in thy head?"

"Aye," replied Hugh Scarlock, "and the young master hath teeth that chatter. He

hath met with a loss, too, but not so great as it might have been."

"What is that, lad?"

But Douglas would not answer, and Hugh Scarlock had to answer for him. The silver bridle had been stolen. Fortunately Bluebell had not been stolen, too.

"Art thou hungry?"

"Thirsty he is too, and yet wet!" added Hugh Scarlock laughing.

The room they entered, although it was but a simple place, seemed very beautiful to the children. Carved sideboard, bright pewter pots, earthen and wooden bowls, carved oak table and carved oak chairs made the room, with its latticed windows, quaint and attractive.

There was a comely girl there, too, who seemed to be the daughter of the innkeeper's wife. She stood by her mother near the chimney and surveyed the in-coming boys and girls shyly. She was clad in a close-fitting gown of bright rose cloth, a broad golden girdle about her loins and upon her hair a wreath of forget-me-nots. Belle and Alice thought that they had never seen any girl who was so beautiful.

## Chapter XI

## A LITTLE PAGE

It seemed to the children that afternoon as if they laughed and smiled more than they had ever done. And that is saying a very great deal.

London Town was such a jolly place to live in. And there were so many interesting things to see and so much that was interesting to do.

They were all agog with excitement as they put on their brightest and most beautiful garments.

"Just see the cloak Sir John has given me!" said Belle.

She held it up before Alice and Janet and little Mary as they were dressing. It was so bright, lined with a sort of rose brocaded satin, trimmed with fur, and made all of a heavy dark green broadcloth.

"Perhaps," said little Janet, "that is your Christmas cloak."

"I think," said Belle, "it is the prettiest cape in all the world."

"Do you suppose," asked Mary, "that Aunt Jan did really give it to you?"

"Why, no, "said Belle, puzzled, "Hugh Scarlock left it here and said his master had told him to bring it to me. Yet," she paused, "it does look like the cape I asked Aunt Jan to give me."

Sir John was going to take them to see a nephew of his who was a page in the royal household. Besides, there was the chance that they might catch a glimpse of the youthful and handsome boy king, Richard II.

At last they were ready to start on their journey to the Court. On the way there Sir John told them that his friend, Master Geoffrey Chaucer, had once been a page in the royal household and had met with favor and preferment.

"Geoffrey Chaucer's father," he went on, "had been a wine merchant and supplied the royal household with wine."

"But I thought," said Paul, "people did not believe in wine merchants."

"What is that?" asked Sir John.

"I mean," explained Paul, "that people

do not think it is right to make liquors and wine and sell them."

"Forsooth," came from Sir John, "of that have I never heard."

"It must be another difference that Old Mountain Time has made," said Alice.

"Yes, perhaps that's it," thought Paul.

Sir John went on telling something about Geoffrey Chaucer when he was a little boy. Chaucer, he said, had lived on Thames Street near the River Thames. He could look out of his windows and see ships from the Mediterranean and Baltic glide past, their sails catching the wind. As he looked out of the windows he could see, too, London Bridge on the horizon, all its piers and buttresses and houses and the chapel of Saint Thomas à Becket stood out sharply on a clear day. Or he could look down on Thames Street and see the folk go clattering by, shouting, quarreling very often, for the streets were narrow then and filled with obstacles of one kind and another, even as they were now. Knights rode by and got their heads caught in the overhanging signs. The sailors on shore went up and down the streets with their strange rolling

gait. Little Geoffrey heard their tales and adventures and their stories about distant lands.

"And I have always thought," concluded Sir John, "'twas such life as he lived when a boy gave him such love as he hath for telling stories."

At last they reached the Court and found Sir John's nephew. He was a handsome boy seventeen years old. Douglas and Paul could not take their eyes away from his clothes. Sir John's nephew was dressed in the fashion, and a very gay fashion it was. He wore a pair of red and black breeches, a short cloak, and some sort of pretty cape.

Sir John asked his nephew to tell the children about his work. The children were surprised to find how hard this boy of the royal household had to work. It was a great household, an army in itself. And it had its soldiers, officers, its pages and clerks, its servants and valets, its priests and surgeons, its stewards and cooks, its stablemen and a score of other positions. The children learned that almost everything used in the royal household was made there, clothes, furniture, weapons, whatever it happened to be.

"But what do you do?" said Douglas, standing with his legs wide apart, surveying this page of the royal household who seemed more like a gaily decorated parrot to Douglas than anything else.

"I?" said the lad, looking gently at Douglas. "I and the other pages attend at table. We cut up the meat for the Master and Mistress. We hand about the dishes, and we pass the ewer and bowl when hands are to be washed."

"Well, I should think hands would need to be washed rather often," said Douglas, "eating with your fingers as you do."

"Eating with our fingers," said Sir John's nephew, "but how else would we eat?"

"Forks!" said Douglas importantly.

But the nephew only looked puzzled, repeated the word "Forks" and seemed not to understand.

The children learned from this charming boy that dinner came very early, as early as eleven o'clock. Even at the Court two people ate from one trencher which was a big slice of bread or a flat piece of wood.

"Don't you do anything else but wait on table?" said Douglas.

"We serve the wine," said the lad courteously, "also we act as messengers."

"I know what a messenger is," said Ferris. "We saw some out on the road."

"Ye may see," added Sir John, "that my nephew hath not much time in which to be idle. He hath his hard work and he will rise in the royal household only by his ability to do work."

Then they all went in to the great hall where the royal household dined. Once in that enormous room the children had an added sense of how diligently this tall boy and his fellow pages must have to work. They saw too at the end of the hall a gallery where the musicians played. The floor under their feet was strewn with rushes in place of the rugs to which the children were accustomed. Pet dogs were still nosing about among the rushes looking for the scraps which had dropped from the table or been thrown to the dogs by their masters and mistresses.

Suddenly they heard a scream. Douglas jumped almost out of his shoes.

"What's that?" he said.

"'Tis nothing," answered Sir John's

nephew, "but one of the master's pet hawks."

The children looked. There along the walls perched on pegs were several hawks kept by the master, the young king.

In the centre of the big hall there was a great stone hearth and above it in the roof a huge aperture through which the smoke passed.

Paul found a book lying on the window sill, and opened it. It was a wonderful book with letters fair and black and as if they had been printed by hand. Along the margins of this book were little scroll-like decorations done in gold and red. And every once in a while there was a fair picture with many colors in it and much life. Paul thought he had never seen such a beautiful book in his life. He felt the covers of it with his long slender hands. The covers were of vellum of a deep rich ivory color.

Sir John's nephew joined him. The two lads were not unlike except that Sir John's nephew was taller and stronger looking and handsomer. But both had gentle studious faces, broad intelligent brows, and eyes that were innocent and kind. As the two boys lingered there by the window, Sir John's

nephew told Paul something of his love for books and of how he read aloud to his mistress who was educated and could read both Latin and Greek.

"Sometime," said Sir John's nephew, "'twould please me to be able to write such a book as the one ye hold in your hand."

"Can you read Latin and Greek?" asked Paul.

"Aye," said the lad, "that can I."

"Can you speak Latin?" asked Paul.

"Aye," said the lad, "Latin is as simple as English."

Paul looked at him in amazement and asked how he had learned so much. Sir John's nephew had been one of the Westminster School boys. Besides that he had had a tutor. And now that he had entered the royal household, it was part of his business to read aloud every day. And all his leisure hours he spent in reading to himself.

Paul watched this boy, wondering. He had some consciousness that all this knowledge seemed to Sir John's nephew more adventure than work, and that the lad loved it. The miracle of sunlight played over the boy's face

as he talked about his reading and his work. It seemed a sort of brightness even as he spoke of it.

And then they went on to talk not only of books but of the out door world. Paul learned that this charming boy, with his fair hair and rosy cheeks and look of almost womanish gentleness, knew something of trees and flowers but that he was learning to know even more of the men and women among whom he lived.

## Chapter XII

## MASTER GEOFFREY CHAUCER

As the children traveled homeward that afternoon it seemed to them that London was the most wonderful place in the world. They thought, too, they had seen everybody in it. Sir John's nephew was a courteous, friendly boy. But the children had had difficulty in understanding him and he in understanding them. The lad spoke round and full and clear, and the children felt as if their speech were somehow thin and sharp and not so attractive as his. A glimpse of the boy king, too, had they caught. Tall and slender was he, very clever looking, but a little womanish.

On the way home Master Geoffrey Chaucer met them, saying that Hugh Scarlock had brought him Sir John's message. He had come to go with them to their inn.

The children looked at him shyly. But he was so kind and so quiet that they quickly lost their fear of him. Besides, the effects of Douglas's ducking in the Thames had worn

off. He was again becoming as noisy as ever and as unmanageable.

Douglas was performing some tricks on Bluebell when past clattered a man clad in armor. He was riding a good horse, but his own clothes and armor looked rusty and as if they had seen service.

"Oh, who is that?" said Douglas.

Master Geoffrey Chaucer turned around.

"Yonder knight," he said, "is a very perfect gentle knight. He has fought and won battles in Egypt. That is his son following him."

The knight's son was singing gaily. He, too, young as he was, for he was only twenty years old, had fought in Flanders and fought well. With them, father and son had one servant, a yeoman and no other. This yeoman had a close-cropped head and nut-brown countenance.

Past went all the London world. It seemed that all the world was known to Chaucer, who described them one after another. There was a prioress whose table manners were so beautiful that she let no morsel fall from her lips. There was a monk, a manly man who was fit to have been an abbot. There was a priest

who was an easy man to give penance. There was a merchant, rich and wearing a Flanderish beaver hat, but his name Geoffrey Chaucer had forgotten. There was a Clerk of Oxford who was not over fat and who would gladly learn and gladly teach. There was a man of law, that is, a lawyer, who seemed to be busier than he was. There was a cook with a sore on his shin, a Doctor who was perhaps a little too fond of gold, and the Wife of Bath who had a gat tooth and who was fat and rode astride. There was a poor Parson who wrote first and taught afterwards, drawing folk to heaven by a good example. There was a Plowman, his brother, who was a good worker and lived in peace and perfect charity with all. And a Miller, a brawler, with a big wart on the end of his nose.

Chaucer pointed to the Nun's Priest, one of the Prioress's attendants, and said that 'twas he who had told him the story of the Cock and the Fox. Chaucer said he thought that some day he would put the story into a book.

"Please, Sir," shouted little Dicky, "couldn't you tell us the story now before you put it into a book?"

"Please, Master Geoffrey Chaucer," begged little Janet, so politely that she made the poet smile, "won't you tell us that story?"

"Yea," answered Chaucer, "when we reach thine inn, little one."

"Oh, thank you!" shouted the children.

"What d'he say that old story was about?" growled Douglas pretending not to be pleased.

"About a cock and a fox," answered Paul.

"Pooh!" said Douglas, "what do we want to hear about an old cock for?"

"'Tis sure to be interesting," said Paul.

"Well," agreed Douglas, condescendingly, "I suppose it might be worse. But you just wait until I get that bow and arrow Sir John promised us, and there won't be any foxes left to talk about. I'll shoot 'em all."

"'Tis a pity," said Master Geoffrey Chaucer, "that thou and thy children are not at the Tabard Inn on the south side of the Thames."

"Yea," said Sir John, embarrassed.

"Then could we all go on a pilgrimage together," said Chaucer.

But Sir John was wondering how he could explain that these were not his children,

especially since he could not explain just whose children they were. Where did they come from? He didn't know. And he dreaded Chaucer's next word.

Chaucer looked at the boys and girls approvingly and said, "I knew not, friend, that thou had such a fair flock of little ones."

"Nay," said Sir John, "they are not mine own."

"Ah!" smiled Chaucer, "whose are they forsooth?"

Sir John went red to the roots of his hair. "That can I not say, friend."

Chaucer chuckled a minute. "Dids't pluck them out of the sky, friend?"

But Sir John was not to be teased. "Nay," he replied sternly.

"Where did these fledglings come from then?"

"That can I not say," came the answer. "I found them adrift at the foot of Old Mountain Time. They were well but strangely dressed and had abundance of coin, but not of our realm. Hugh Scarlock and I were on our return from the East. 'Here, Master,' saith Hugh Scarlock, 'is an

adventure.' 'Aye,' said I, 'and what to do?' 'We cannot leave them in this wilderness, Master,' he replied, 'where wolves hunt in packs, and where the children, if they live, must become children of the woods.' 'Nay,' said I, 'leave them, we cannot.' 'Then, let us take them with us,' said Hugh Scarlock. And it occurred to me that the great adventure, the love of little children, had never been mine. So did we get other clothes for them. Then by degrees, though not rapidly, have we come to understand their speech which is English and yet not English."

"How so?" asked Master Geoffrey Chaucer.

"That can I not say. The words they use are familiar and yet altered. They speak strangely of having lived in the Twentieth Century."

"Aye, that is strange," commented Chaucer looking down upon the ground as if he were thinking, "for 'twould be six hundred years towards the future."

"Yea," said Sir John, "six hundred years and more."

"'Tis passing strange," continued Chaucer. "'Twould be easier to understand how the

little ones could come out of the past than how they might come out of the future which is not yet born."

But the poet lifted his head and smiled upon the children, these children of an undreamed-of future. Here was an adventure and new pilgrimage and dear to his heart.

"Several of the children have spoken of 'Amerigo' and also of 'Columbus'," said Sir John, "the one is a name common in Portugal where I have encountered it."

"No, America," objected Paul.

"Aye, Amerigo," agreed Sir John.

"It is the country, America," said Alice.

"He does not understand," explained Belle.

"And the name Columbus," continued Sir John, "is one common in Spain where my servants and I have been."

"In Fourteen hundred and ninety-two,
Columbus sailed the ocean blue," shouted Douglas.

Both Sir John and Master Geoffrey Chaucer stared at him. The boy spoke naturally of a date which was some one hundred years in advance of this date when they were riding on horseback through London. It was a

mystery and even Master Geoffrey Chaucer could make nothing of it.

At last they reached their inn. They made ready before a blazing fire to hear the story Chaucer had promised to tell them about the Cock and the Fox.

## Chapter XIII

## THE COCK AND THE FOX

"Once upon a time———" Chaucer began.

Then he stopped.

"Once upon a time what?" asked the children.

"Come, my babes," said Chaucer, his eyes twinkling, "look at yonder London Bridge!"

"We're not babes," answered Paul.

"We want that story you promised about the Cock and the Fox," begged Janet.

"Oh!" replied Chaucer innocently. "Well once upon a time——" he broke off, staring at London Bridge.

"Go on! Go on!" shouted the children.

"I think they must be catching a thief over yonder on the bridge," came from Chaucer.

"Please, sir," said Mary, "go on with the story!"

"Dost know whether my story is about a thief, little one?"

"You tell us, Sir," begged Mary.

And so he did.

"Well, once upon a time, perhaps in my time since I, Geoffrey Chaucer, know all about this story, there lived a widow and her two daughters. And this widow had a remarkable cock or rooster called Chanticleer. She was a poor widow, as widows sometimes are. She lived on milk and brown bread. Once in awhile she had a bit of bacon or an egg or two.

'Of course this widow had a yard. In this yard lived Chanticleer. For crowing there was not his equal. Forsooth I will tell ye, children, that Chanticleer's crowing was merrier than the merry organ and that his comb was redder than fine coral, and battlemented like a castle wall. His bill was as black and shiny as jet and his color was like burnished gold.

'This cock had seven hens who lived with him. The fairest of these hens was Pertelote. She was courteous, discreet, and debonair as even—so I tell thee—a hen may be. Needless to say, Chanticleer loved her."

"Do roosters and hens really love one another?" asked little Mary.

Chaucer laid his finger along one side of his nose and thought hard.

"That question, my child," he sighed, "can I not answer."

"One day at dawning when Chanticleer was on his perch and Pertelote was beside him, the cock began to groan in his throat like a man frightened by a bad dream.

"And when that Pertelote thus heard him roar,
She was aghast, and said, 'O, heart, my own,
What aileth you to cause this groan?
You are a foolish dreamer, fie, for shame!"

"Madam," he answered, "I pray you take it not amiss. But in my sleep I saw a terrible looking beast that leaped upon me. Aye, his color was betwixt yellow and red. His snout was small. He had two glowing eyes. And I almost died for fear of this beast."

"Alas!' quoth she, 'for by the Heavens above,
Now have you lost my heart and all my love,
I cannot love a coward, by my faith!
For certainly, what so any saith,
We all desire, if it so haply be,
To have our husbands hardy, wise, and free,
Close-mouthed, and no niggard, and no fool,
Nor one that is afraid of every tool,

And no boaster, by that Heaven above!
How dare you say for shame unto your love
At anything that liveth you have fear?
Have you no manly heart, who have a
beard?"

"Oh," said Ferris, "how could a rooster have a beard?"

"Why might he not?" asked Chaucer gravely. "Hath he not a comb to comb it with?"

This set the children all to laughing, and Chaucer continued.

"My children, it is perfectly plain that Chanticleer's wife was a hen of the most uncommon common sense. In truth, she suspecteth him of indigestion and adviseth him promptly to take some medicine. She then read frightened Chanticleer a lecture on herbs about which she knew a great deal. She concludeth with the sensible advice to pick up these herbs, eat them quickly, and to dread no dreams."

"I didn't know that hens could talk," said Janet.

"Hast never heard them say Cluck! Cluck! Cluck! child? And what more does any woman say?"

"Aunt Jan," piped up Dicky, "never told us anything about talking hens. But she gave Mary a talking doll last year."

"Forsooth a talking hen is more natural, my child," continued Chaucer. "Well, Chanticleer as promptly told Pertelote about dreams which had come true, concerning which she might read in old books. He quoted Cicero and other authors. And he told some horrible stories which had come true, as dreams sometimes do.

"And one day in early March when the cock was walking with all seven hens beside him, he lifted up his head and looked about him.

"That sun," he said, "is climbing up on Heaven,
Forty degrees and one and more, y-wis.
Madam, dear Pertelote, my world of bliss,
Hearkeneth these blissful birdies how they sing,
And see the fresh, fair flowers how they spring."

"Yet as suddenly he felt sad, for ever, he reflecteth, the latter end of joy is woe.

"Alas, a brant fox, Don Russell, a fox, with black hairs amid the brown, had lived in a

grove near by for some three years! And that same night Don Russell crept into the yard and lay in hiding among the bed of vegetables, waiting his time to fall on Chanticleer.

"But didn't Chanticleer know he lived there?" asked Douglas.

"Nay, lad, yet had he been forewarned by his dreams. Although he had refused the medicine, he had listened to the advice of his wife and walked in the yard the day after his dream. The cock was looking at a butterfly which had lighted upon the vegetables. Suddenly espied he the fox.

"Cock, cock," cried Chanticleer, and starteth up, frightened in his very heart.

"Gentle Sir," the fox called out, when he saw the cock start away, "where art thou going? Why art thou afraid of me, who am thy friend? I should be afraid to do thee harm. I have just come to listen to thy beautiful singing, for truly thou hast a more beautiful voice than any angel. Assuredly I never heard any one sing more wonderfully except thy father. Now sing, Sir. Let us see whether thou canst outdo thy own father."

"Good children, Don Russell was a sly fox.

By his tact had he flattered both Chanticleer's family pride and personal pride. And the cock was a foolish cock, for he believed all this flattery.

"Did the Fox get him?" Paul asked excitedly.

"Alas! Chanticleer stood up high upon his toes, stretcheth out his neck, and holdeth his eyes tight shut. Then he croweth loud and long.

"At that Don Russell, the fox, seized Chanticleer by the throat and bore him off on his back to the woods.

"And I, Geoffrey Chaucer tell ye, little ones, that when the hens saw this awful sight, Pertelote screamed louder than did Hasdrubul's wife, she was so full of grief and rage. Greater was the noise than when Nero burned Rome and the Senators' wives cried out because their husbands lost their lives.

"And out flew the widow and her two daughters, crying, "Ha! Ha! The Fox," and rushed after him.

"And after them ran men with sticks to beat the fox. Out ran the collie dog and the cow and the calf and the very hogs.

"And they all ran after the fox as if their hearts would break. The men and women yelled, the ducks cackled, the geese flew over the trees, the bees swarmed out of the hive, and probably there was never a more hideous noise than they all made on that day.

"Sir," said the cock, hearing this dreadful noise and taking fresh courage, even while the fox was bearing him away on his back. "Sir, I would turn on these men and women and say 'Be off! I have reached the woods. Here shall the cock abide, and here will I eat him!"

"What did he answer?" asked Alice.

"The fox answered, "In faith, it shall be done."

"And forsooth as he opened his mouth to say these words, the cock broke away and flew high up on a tree out of the fox's reach.

"Alas," said the Fox, looking up into the tree, "I have done amiss to thee, if I have frightened thee. Come down and I will tell thee why I carried thee off from the henyard."

"Thou shalt not beguile me again through thy flattery into closing my eyes and singing," answered the cock. "He that closeth his eyes when he should keep them open, never thrives."

## Chapter XIV

## BOWS AND ARROWS

The next day Douglas was amazed to see hundreds of boys and men flocking past the windows, all of them carrying bows and arrows.

"See all those bows and arrows!" shouted Douglas, who had finished his breakfast before the others and was standing in the early morning sunlight by the window.

"Why have they all got bows and arrows?" asked Ferris, standing up from the bench on which he was sitting.

"'Tis a holiday," answered Hugh Scarlock, who was serving them.

"But they don't have to bring bows and arrows even if it is a holiday, do they?" objected Douglas.

"Aye, young master, they do," said Hugh Scarlock, "for 'tis the law of the land."

"Why is it the law of the land?" asked Paul.

"In 1363 King Edward the Third made it

a law that on Sundays and holidays all men should be required to practice archery and all other sports did he forbid," came the answer.

"But what did he do that for?" Alice wanted to know.

"For the strength and defense of our Country," came the answer, sturdy and loyal, from Hugh Scarlock.

The children, one after another, hopped to the windows, looking out upon the houses built of oak framework filled with plaster and whitewashed, upon the carving which was to be found on all the corners and on the oldest of the houses, and the oak shingled roofs. Opposite was a tall cross of stone, beautifully carved.

Up and down the little street hundreds of men were coming or going carrying bows in linen cases which had been oiled or waxed until they were yellow.

"They have been shooting at the butts," said Hugh Scarlock.

Sir John, who had stayed up late talking with Master Geoffrey Chaucer, now came in. He looked rosy and jolly as usual. The

children crowded about him shouting out to him about the bows and arrows they had seen.

"Aye, aye, aye," laughed Sir John, "we will go into the country this very day and ye shall have bows and arrows and practice a-plenty."

It was not long before all were on their horses and ponies and on their way out into the country to practice archery.

Hugh Scarlock had a brother there who had married a bailiff's daughter. Gregory Scarlock met them on the outskirts of the village. He took them to the field where the good folk practiced archery. Scores of men and lads did they find there. And even girls and women bringing sheafs of arrows were allowed by father or brother or lover to take an occasional aim at the target.

As the men came up to practice, they pulled off their coats and hung them on near-by trees. Then they opened their quivers, taking out a dozen or more arrows which they stuck ready to hand in the ground. Everywhere was the harsh twang of bow strings and the whistle of the flying arrow shaft.

Gregory Scarlock gave bows and arrows to Sir John and the children, a great yew bow

to Sir John and little bows of wych-hazel to the children.

Sir John looked at his yew bow with interest.

"'Tis mine own bow," said Gregory.

"Aye," said Sir John, "ye do well to be proud of it, for the law requires that four bows of wych-hazel be made to every one bow of yew so that the yew be not used up too fast. And I wot that only the best and most useful are allowed to bear the yew bows," concluded Sir John.

The children were having a great time nocking their arrows—that is fitting the notched head of the arrow into the bow string. And then they began to shoot. Sir John had promised a prize to the boy or girl who hit the target most often. That child was to have a beautiful bow and a quiver full of arrows. During the first part of the time Douglas and Ferris shot best. Then Alice began to improve so rapidly that the contest was between Ferris and Alice.

They shot on, each time keeping the score a tie until Sir John said if Gregory was willing he would let them finish their score with the

The children began to shoot.

yew bow. And Ferris was so much stronger that they had not had two rounds before he had beaten Alice and won the promised bow and quiver of arrows.

"Isn't that too funny," exclaimed Ferris, "that I should win the bow and arrows, for Aunt Jan had promised them to me for Christmas!"

Sir John said that it had been his fault Alice had not had a fair chance to win, so he asked her, if she might have anything she wished, what she would have.

"A pair of skates," answered Alice.

But Sir John could not understand what it was Alice wished until she used her foot and a knife blade to show what she meant.

"Aye, aye!" exclaimed Sir John, "bone runners for the ice!"

Bone runners sounded so odd to the children that they all laughed.

"Forsooth, Master," said Gregory to Sir John, "there is a pair of bone runners at the cottage for the young mistress to see!"

After that they followed Gregory to a house which to the girls seemed very beautiful, although on the first floor there was but one

large room and above, the loft where all slept. The table was set for them, for it was lunch time. In the centre of the table was a big salt-cellar of pewter covered over with a white cloth. And there was meat and drink upon the table. About the room were many flowers, fleur-de-lys, poppies and others. There was the great open fireplace where the bailiff's daughter was doing the cooking. Against one wall was a beautiful carved cupboard with many vases and dishes in it of pewter and of wood chiefly. The walls were covered with loosely worked old blue stuff which was gay with tapestried birds and trees.

Gregory led Sir John and Alice up to the fireplace. And there hung the bone runners or skates, odd-looking they were, too, with many thongs with which to bind them to the feet. Alice hid her disappointment as best she could when she saw these clumsy contrivances. But Gregory looked very proud.

"I hear, Master," he said, "that skating is very much liked in London, and that when the great fen or moor is frozen many young ones play on the ice."

"Aye," replied Sir John, "they tie these

bone runners to the feet and shove themselves along with a little picked staff. And they do skate as swiftly as a bird flieth in the air or an arrow out of a cross bow."

"Has it been long a custom there?" asked Gregory.

"It has," answered Sir John, "and the use of metal runners is coming in. 'Tis a custom has come from the Norsemen and is centuries old."

And when they sat down to dinner, Hugh Scarlock and his brother Gregory Scarlock and the bailiff's daughter waited on them. The children ate heartily of bread and meat and cherries. Never, thought they, had they seen such beautiful, big cherries.

And before they had finished eating, the bailiff's daughter dropped a pretty curtsey before Sir John, saying, "Your Honor hath traveled far and seen much forsooth whereas we have seen but little. An' 'tis said Your Honor hath written a book. Our priest who liveth yonder"—she pointed out of the window to an ancient and most beautiful stone home—"heard this from a man in London."

Belle, who had ambitions to write a book,

looked at Sir John and whispered to Alice, "I think his book must be wonderful, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Alice, "wonderful!"

But the bailiff's daughter, who was dressed in a closely fitting gown of old blue and had a white cap on her hair, was still bobbing her pretty curtsey before Sir John.

"Yonder good priest," she continued, "sayeth the book is called THE VOYAGES AND TRAVELS OF SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE and that 'tis the best English travel book ever written and full of marvels. An it please Your Honor, tell us somewhat from the book that we may fill our minds."

Gregory Scarlock touched his forelock and repeated his wife's request.

Hugh Scarlock smiled proudly and kept saying, "Aye, Master, tell them somewhat of all we have seen and done!"

Paul said under his breath to Douglas, "Oh, I do hope he will tell something!"

And Douglas forgetting to disagree, agreed.

Sir John looked around affectionately at the simple people, with their hungry minds. Had they not fed his hunger with their best?

Why should he not try to feed their hunger which was of the mind and not the body?

Three long lads who cared for the cattle had slipped shyly inside the door. And the Priest had come over and been given the seat of honor beside Sir John. And the stout bailiff himself had come in, and was standing first on one foot, then the other, near his daughter and the fireplace. And three of the Gregory Scarlock children had crept in and were hanging onto their mother's skirts.

## Chapter XV

## A WONDER BOOK

"Good folk," began Sir John, "it is true that I have written a book of travels. But I wrote it first in French and it hath been translated into English and Latin. However, that will interest ye but little. What shall I tell ye of all your kinsman, Hugh Scarlock, and I have seen and done?"

"What ye will, Master," came from the people.

"Nay, that might be more than ye wanted! Shall I tell ye how and when the rose was first born and why? Or of loadstones which draw ships on unto destruction? Or of the well of youth where I have drunk my fill? Or of snails so big a man may lodge in their shells? Or of cockodrills which are serpents with four feet? Or of pigmies, little folk which never grow large? Or of a wise man who bound three arrows together and showed that they were stronger than one? Or of a river that runs only three days in a week? Or of giants

twenty-eight to thirty feet long? For all of these wonders have I seen."

"Tell about the rose," begged the bailiff's daughter.

"I want to know about those giants thirty feet long," shouted Douglas.

Master, tell about the loadstones," begged Gregory.

And so did each one ask for what he wanted.

"Forsooth, Bethlehem is a little city, long and narrow," began Sir John, "and well walled as I have written it down in my book of travel. Towards the east end of the city is a very fair and handsome church, with many towers, pinnacles, and corners strongly and curiously made, and within are forty-four great and fair pillars of marble.

"And between the city and the church is the Field Floridus, that is to say, the field flourished. For a fair maiden was blamed with wrong, and slandered. And because of the wrong with which she was blamed, was she condemned to be burnt in that place. As the fire began to burn about her, she made her prayers to our Lord, that as truly as she was not guilty, he would by his merciful grace

help her, and make it known to all men. And when she had thus said, she entered into the fire. And immediately the fire was extinguished, and the faggots that were burning became red rose-bushes, and those that were not kindled became white rose-bushes, full of roses. And these were the first rose-trees and roses, both white and red, that ever any man saw. And thus was the maiden saved by the grace of God. And therefore is that field called the field that God flourished for it was full of roses."

"Aye, aye, 'tis a wonderful tale and it must be true!" said the bailiff's daughter.

"Oh, I do think it is so beautiful!" exclaimed Belle.

"Tell more, please, tell more!" came from all the children whose eyes were like stars and who had crowded nearer and nearer to Sir John.

Sir John paused and twiddled his thumbs. His eyes were twinkling, too, for he was enjoying to the full the children's pleasure in the story he had re-told from his book called THE VOYAGES AND TRAVELS OF SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE.

"Forsooth," he began slowly, "there is a

city called Chilenfo of which the walls are twenty miles in circumference."

"Why are they as big as that?" asked Ferris.

"Because the city is large and must be protected," came the reply.

"Oh, don't interrupt!" said Alice impatiently.

"In that city," continued Sir John, "are sixty bridges of stone, so fair that no man may see fairer."

"Are they as big as London Bridge?" asked Douglas, who felt that since his ducking he knew the height, breadth, and depth of London Bridge better than anyone else.

"Hum!" coughed Sir John, "not quite so large! And in that city was the first seat of the King of Mancy, for it is a fair city and plentiful in all goods.

"Hence we pass across a great river called Dulay, which is the greatest river of fresh water in the world, for where it is narrowest it is more than four miles broad. And then men enter again the land of the great Chan.

"That river goes through the land of pigmies, where the people are small, but three spans long."

"How long is a span, please?" asked Paul.

"Nine inches."

"Then that means those pigmies were only twenty-seven inches high," said Douglas.

"Aye, my boy, two feet and three inches was the average height there. Well, these pigmies are right fair and gentle, both the men and women. They live but six or seven years at most. And he that liveth eight years is considered very aged. These men are our best workers of gold, silver, cotton, silk, and of all such things that are in the world."

"And they have often times war with the birds of the country, which they take and eat. This little people neither labor in lands nor in vineyards. But they have great men amongst them, of our stature, who till the land and labor amongst the vines for them.

"Of the men of our stature they have as great scorn and wonder as we should have among us of giants. They have a great and fair city which has a large population of these little people. Five miles from that city, towards the mouth of the river of Dulay, is another city, called Menke, in which is a strong navy of ships, all white as snow, from the colour

of the trees from which they are made. They are very great and fair ships, and well ordained, and made with halls and chambers, and other easements, as though it were on land. From thence men go by many towns and many cities to a city called Lanteryne, eight days from the last city mentioned. This city is situated upon a fair, great and broad river, called Caramaron, which passed though Cathay, and it often overflows and does much harm."

"Just think," said Belle to Janet and Mary, "both of you are bigger than the biggest of these pigmies!"

"Were they real, please, Sir John?" asked Dicky.

"Forsooth, very real, my child," came the reply.

"Of course," said Belle. "You remember Tom Thumb, Sir John, don't you?"

Sir John shook his head. "Nay, child, who was Tom Thumb?"

Douglas, as he listened to this conversation had a curious sense of separation steal over him and he remembered the Old Mountain Time which stood like a wall between past and present.

"I guess," Douglas explained slowly, "Tom Thumb has come since the time we are living in now."

"Please," begged Ferris, "tell about the giants!"

The simple country folk in the room stood about, mouths agape, waiting for the next story. Some of them grunted in their excitement. Some of them said "Oh!" in a wondering tone of voice.

"Beyond a place by the name of the Perilous Vale is a great isle," began Sir John. "The inhabitants of this isle are giants of twenty-eight or thirty feet long, with no clothing but skins of beasts, that they hang upon them. They eat nothing but raw flesh, and drink milk of beasts. They have no houses to lie in. And they eat more gladly man's flesh than any other flesh.

"Into that isle can no man enter. If they see a ship, and men therein, they step into the sea to take them. And men told us that in an isle beyond that were giants of greater stature, some of forty-five or fifty feet long, and even, as some men say, of fifty cubits long."

"What's a cubit?" asked Douglas.

"I know," answered Paul. "A cubit is eighteen inches or a foot and a half."

"Then that means a man seventy-five feet high!" said Douglas quick as a wink. "That must be something of a man! Did you see them, Sir John?"

"Nay, I saw none of those fifty cubits high. I had no lust to go to that isle because no man has ever gone into that isle but that he was devoured anon.

"Among those giants are sheep as great as oxen here, which bear great rough wool. And men have said many times those giants take men in the sea, out of the ships, and bring them to land, two in one hand and two in the other, eating them going, all raw and alive."

## Chapter XVI

## AND THEN—

"Merry Christmas!" came a voice, which sounded a thousand miles away.

"Keep off, giant!" shouted Douglas, flinging his arms about in sleep. "Oh! He's coming towards me. I don't want to be eaten alive! Keep off, I say!"

"Merry Christmas!" said the one-eyed giant stretching his mouth very wide and shaking his big black locks, and smiling such a terrible smile. "Merry Christmas!"

Then before Douglas's opening eyes the giant's face gradually altered, shifted, changed, shrank a little, turned from grin to smile, and from black locks to a multitude of little curls, from one red flaming eye to two gentle blue eyes.

"Oh!" said Douglas, looking up into Aunt Jan's face.

"Having a bad dream, dear?" came the question.

"I thought," said Douglas, "you were a giant."

"I thought you thought I was very terrifying," Aunt Jan agreed.

She was holding out something towards him which sparkled and glittered and shone. Douglas stared at it. It couldn't be!

"What is it?" he asked in a whisper, lifting himself onto his elbow.

"Can't you see?" asked Aunt Jan.

"It's—it's my—silver bridle," said Douglas putting out his hand. "It's the one Sir John gave me for Bluebell."

"Why, the idea," exclaimed Aunt Jan puzzled, "the one Sir John gave you for Bluebell! You ungrateful boy, it's the one *I* am giving *you* for Bluebell! You've been dreaming!"

Douglas took the silver bridle in his hands.

"Yes, I have been dreaming," he said. "I have been some place else, ever and ever so far away, over Old Mountain Time, centuries ago, I guess. How did Sir John ever get back that bridle?"

"Get back what?" asked Aunt Jan, amazed.

"That silver bridle which was stolen on London Bridge."

"I think I must have told you children too many stories the last thing last night. Every single one of you had to be carried to bed."

Douglas turned the bridle over in his hands.

"That is a jim dandy bridle!" he exclaimed earnestly. "I must get right up and go out and show it to Bluebell."

He tumbled out of bed, gave a leap upon Aunt Jan, hugged her until she gasped, and thanked her over and over. It was just what he wanted but he hadn't thought he would ever own such a beauty!

"Well, you're an old sleepy-head!" shouted the children rushing into Douglas's room.

"See my puppy!" said little Mary hugging a fuzzy bundle of puppy with a mop of hair, two bright beady eyes and a long pointed nose.

"Wuff! Wuff! Wuff!" yapped the puppy, charging Douglas's bare legs.

"Say, Doug," shrieked Dicky above the noise made by the rest, "you ought to see my pony! She's out in the stall by your Bluebell and her name is Trotter."

Ferris had a bow and a quiver of arrows in his hands.

"See my bow and arrows Aunt Jan gave me."

"Yes, I have seen those before," said Douglas quietly.

"Why, you foolish boy," said Aunt Jan, "you haven't seen them before! I haven't shown them to anyone!"

"Sir John," began Douglas.

"Come," said Aunt Jan, laughing, "you'll be saying Sir John gave the bow and arrows to Ferris."

"I thought he did," said Douglas. "Well, I guess I must be half asleep!"

"See my cloak!" said Belle.

"Yes, I've seen it!" came from Douglas.

"Now see here, youngster," said Aunt Jan, "you needn't work up any new variety of contrariness. You have enough varieties already."

"I'm not," said Douglas, "only I tell you, Aunt Jan, I've seen all these things before!"

He ducked his head in a basin of cold water and came up dripping to find Paul holding out a book under his wet nose.

"Aunt Jan gave me this," exclaimed Paul. "She wrote it herself and it's called THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD STORIES."

"Oh, say!" exclaimed Douglas beginning to

feel a bit puzzled again as he polished the water off the end of his snubby nose. "Well, I — —"

But Aunt Jan's hand was over his mouth, holding back the words.

"No, you shan't say it! You ungrateful boy!"

"Say what?" asked Douglas from behind her hand.

"Say you have heard about these stories before."

"I have," said Douglas.

"See my skates!" exclaimed Alice, jingling them before him.

"But I'm glad they aren't bone runners!" came from Douglas.

"Bone runners?" said Aunt Jan. "Where did you get that?"

"They used to use bones—strap 'em onto their feet," commented Douglas. "I just missed seeing them skate on bones in London."

"They did use to use bone skates," came from Aunt Jan. "But how did you know that, Douglas?"

She looked at him curiously—almost anxiously.

"Aunt Jan gave me a pretty little new trap for our ponies," shouted Janet, getting in her word.

"Yes," said Douglas, parting his hair and brushing it, "and it is made of wickerwork—like a basket, you know."

"How'd you know?" demanded Janet.

"Sir John showed me one like that," explained Douglas, "when we were on the road to London."

"If you aren't the most provoking, contrary boy that ever lived!" exclaimed Aunt Jan.

"No, I'm not, Aunt Jan," contradicted Douglas, looking straight into her eyes. "I've seen it all—honest, I have."

He threw his arms about her and gave her another hug.

Then he picked up the silver bridle and said, "Jiminy, won't Bluebell be proud and pleased when she sees this silver bridle!"

THE END.

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